FOLK TALES OF INDIA SERIES 20 VOLUMES

General Editor P C Roy Chaudhury

FOLK TALES OF GUJARAT

20 VOLUMES IN THE SERIES

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FOLK TALES OF GUJARAT

TARA BOSE



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It is unfortunate that the study of folklore in India is of very recent origin This is all the more regrettable because the *Parchatantra* stories which had th ir origin in Bihar had spread through various channels almost throughout the world As late as in 1859, T Benfey had held that there is an unmistakable stamp of Indian origin in most of the fairy tales of Europe The same stories with different twists or complexes have come back to us through Grimm and Aesop and the retold stories are greedily swallowed by our children That India has neglected a proper study of the beautiful motifs of our folk tales is seen in the fact that the two large volumes of dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend published by Messrs Funk and Wagnalls and Company of New York have given a very inadequate reference to India

What is the secret of the fascination of the folk tales that the old young and the children are kept enthralled by their recitals ? The same story is often repeated but does not lose its interest The secret is the satisfaction that our basic curiosity finds in the folk tales The folk tales through phantasies make-beliefs and complacent understanding help the primitive man to satisfy his curiosity about the mysteries of the world and parti cularly the very many inexplicable phenomena of nature around him We have an element of primitiveness in our mind in spite of the advancement of science around us Even a scientist finds great delight in the fairy tales of the moon being attacked as the origin of the lunar eclipse Through the folk tales man exercised his once limited vision and somehow or the other we would like to retain that limited vision even when we have grown up The advancement in science can never replace the folk tales On the other hand folk tales have helped the scientific curiosity in the man In spite of the scientific explanation as to why earthquakes take place the old young and the child would still be delighted to be told that the world rests on the hood of the great snake and when the snake is tired with the weight he shakes the hood and there is an earthquake Among the Mundas an aboriginal tribe in Bihar, there is a wonderful explanation of the Orion The sword and b lt of the Orion

the Mundas imagine form their appropriate likeness to the plough and plough share which the supreme *Sing Bonga* God first shaped in the heavens and then taught people on earth how to use the plough and the plough share It is further in the Munda folk tale that while the *Sing Bonga* was shaping the plough and the plough share with a chisel and a hammer he observed a dove hatching on its eggs at a little distance The *Sing Bonga* threw his hammer at the dove to bag the game He missed his mark and the hammer went over the dove s head and hung on a tree The hammer corresponds to the Pleiads which resembles a hammer The Aldebaran is the dove and the other stars of Hyades are the eggs of the dove Any illiterate Munda boy will unmistakably point out these star groups

Weather and climate have their own stories and are often connected with particular stages of the crops The wet season and the hottest month are intimately associated with the ripening of crops or the blossoming of trees or the frequency of dust storms and stories are woven round them But nothing is more satisfying as a folk story than the explanation of the phases of the stars moon and the sun A Munda would point out the milky way as the *Gal Hora* i e the path of the cows The *Sing Bonga* God leads his cows every day along this path—the dusky path on the sky is due to the dust raised by the herd The dust raised by the cows sends down the rains A story of this type can never fail to sustain its interest in spite of all the scientific explanation of the astral bodies

The 'why and therefore of the primitive mind tried to seek an answer in the surrounding animal and plant kingdom Animals are grouped into different categories according to their intelligence and other habits The fox is always sly while the cow is gentle The lion and the tiger have a majestic air while the horse is swift sleek and intelligent The slow going elephant does not forget its attendant nor does he forget a man that teases him Monkeys are very near the mankind The peacock is gay while the crow is shrewd The tortoise is slow going but sure footed The hare is swift but apt to laze on the road The primitive mind is not unintelligent to decipher these inherent

characteristics of the common animals he m ets Similarly when he sees a large and shady Peepal tree he naturally associates it as the abode of the sylvan god Th thick jungle with its trees and foliage is known to be frequented by thieves and dacoits Any solitary hut in the thick of th forest must be associated with someone unscrupulous or uncanny These ideas are commonly woven into stories and through them the primitive mind seeks to satisfy the eternal why ar d how of the mind Folk literature is often crude and even grotesque The stories of the witches and the ogres come in this categ ry There is nothing to be surprised at that They reflect the particular stage of the development of the human mind and also a projec tion of the beliefs and fads of the mind Scientific accuracy should never be looked for in folk tales although folk tales are a very good reflex of the social development of a particular time

It is enough if the basic ideas regarding the animal and plant kingdom still satisfy that the donkey is dense or stupid or the snake typifies slyness and the fox is deceitful repeated in ancient folk tales have stood the test of age and that would show that the primitive mind was not foolish or credulous The very idea that the folk tales have woven man nature animal and plant creation together shows the great flight of imagination and a singular development of mind Introduction of moral lessons or any dogma was not done as an after thought but came in as a very natural development

The last source of the folk tales is human society itself The elemental moorings that are at the root of human society are sought to be illustrated in folk tales The day to day life of the common man finds its full depiction in the folk tales Parental love family happiness children s adventurous habits love and fear for the unknown greed etc are some of the usual themes of folk tales The common man yearns for riches and comforts he cannot usually look for He dreams of riches princes kingdoms etc and finds a satisfaction in the stories of fantasy Men love gossip and scandal Women cannot keep secrets children will love their parents a mother in law will

always think the daughter in law needs to be told—these are some of the basic ideas that make up much of our daily life The folk tales are woven round them and whether fantastic or with a moral undertone they only reflect the daily chores, tears and joys of the common man

Unknowingly the folklorists bring in the religious custom beliefs food habits mode of dress, superstitions etc and thereby leave a picture of the culture complex of the region and its people A tribal story does not picture a king riding a white big foaming horse followed by hundreds of other horsemen going for a *shikar* In a tribal story the Raja will be found cutting the grass and bringing back a stack of it for feeding his cows but a folk tale more current in urban areas will have large palaces liveried servants ministers and courtiers in the king s court All this only means that the time and the venue of the origin of the stories are widely different It is here that the sociologists and the anthropologists come in useful As life is different in rural and urban areas or is chequered with goodness or badness of the world so is folk literature diversified, as it must be—being a replica of life

It is a pity that these beautiful folk tales in India were almost on the point of disappearance when a few pioneers mostly consisting of foreign missionaries and European scholars looked into them and made compilations in different parts of India Our present run of grandmothers knows very little of them The professional story tellers who were very dearly sought after by the old and the young not to speak of the children have almost completely disappeared from India The film industry and the film songs pose a definite threat to folklore

The Sterling Publishers are to be congratulated for launching the project of publishing a compilation of 20 volumes consisting of the folk tales of different regions The work has been entrusted to specially selected writers who have an intimate knowledge of their region The regional complex of the stories has been sought to be preserved as far as possible The stories have an elemental involvement about them and they are such as

are expected to appeal to the child and its parent We expect the reader of the folk tales of the particular region to have a *feeling after a study of the stories that he has enjoyed a whiff of* air of that area We want him to have an idea of how Kashmiri folks retire in wintry nights with the *Kangri* under the folds of their clothes to enjoy gossips and how they enjoy their highly spiced meaty food We want him to appreciate the splash of colour of the sari and the flowers that are a must in Tamilnadu We want him to know the stories that are behind some of the famous temples in the South as Kanjeevaram temple We want him to know the story regarding the construction of the famous Konarak temple We want him to enjoy the stories of the heroes of Gujarat Punjab and Rajasthan in their particular roles We want the reader to have an idea of the peace and quiet of a hut in the lap of the Kumaon hills We want the reader to enjoy some of the folk tales of Bengal and Bihar that have found wings in other parts of India and to appreciate the village life with their *Alpana* and *Bratas* At the same time we want the reader to appreciate the customs and manners of the Santhals Garos and the other tribes inhabiting Nefa and Assam

The Publishers want to have a miniature India in these volumes of folk tales of the different regions of India It is an ambitious project The authors have to be thanked for their interest in the work I am sure they have enjoyed the assignment It is hoped the books will be found useful and interesting to the public I have no hesitation to say that the stories of the different areas do make out a miniature India It is hoped the reader will enjoy the stories and will come to know a little of the region and its people

P C Roy Chaudhury

PREFACE

The word Gujarat comes from 'Gujjaratta which means the land of the Gurjars It appears that a tribe called the Gurjars migrated into India in the fifth century A D The real cultural history of Gujarat began with the advent of the Aryans led by Lord Krishna who came from Mathura to this part some 3 500 years ago Lord Krishna ruled for nearly a century

Gujarat has three distinct regions The Gujarat proper Saurashtra and Kutch Because of their independent spirit and the desire to remain free the British were unable to subjugate Saurashtra and Kutch in many parts and they remained under the princely order It appears from the songs and stories of Gujarat that in these regions there were more or less city states in the olden times Traditionally the princes were the supporters of the bards the story tellers the musicians and the folk dancers

Muslim rule in Gujarat is very evident Gujarat attained some prosperity under Ahmed Shah—the founder of Ahmedabad and Mahmood Beghda The best specimens of Muslim architecture in Gujarat are the heritage of these independent Muslim *Sultans*

The *Kshatriyas* or the Rajputs of Rajasthan who settled in Gujarat brought with them other fighting communities like the *Mers* and the *Ahirs* Groups of farmers including the *Rabaris* the *Charans* and the *Bharwads* also settled down in the *Gir* and other forests and began farming and breeding cattle From the coastal regions came the Bhils and the Kohlis Each brought their own songs their dances and their stories

It was Zaver Chand Meghani who through his monumental research work first brought to light the beauty which lay in the Lok Sahitya or folk lore of Gujarat I have delved into his work as well as some others But most of my collection of stories have been obtained by listening to others as folk lore in Gu arat keeps on circulating mainly by word of mouth particularly through such well known story tellers as the *Kag Kavi* and the *Charans*

I have enjoyed listening to these anecdotes stories and poems and have used them giving them the flavour of the countryside which I have come to know so well I have driven out into the fields where the grain is almost ready for harvesting watched the mighty bullocks with their enormous curved horns

sometimes tipped with silver talked with the farmers who with their women make an unforgettable picture of rustic beauty and simplicity—the men in their bright coloured turbans and the women wearing quantities of silver ornaments and richly embroidered skirts with tiny mirrors carrying half a dozen brass pots on their heads All around me life is unfolding itself and changing The screeching of the peacock has now become familiar and I no longer become startled when the night is about to end and dawn creeps softly It is the peacock s shrill call which awakens me Out in the country side the cranes sweep down into the fields of groundnut and on the beach of the sea the sand and the sky is pink with the flamingoes who stand huddled together picking at fish but when disturbed flap their wings and fly—a mass of pink and black

Names of villages conjure up stories of heroism of *Barbatiyas* the famous outlaws of Gujarat who had a law of their own and abided by it honourably of brave Rajput women who fought side by side with their men of others who burnt themselves for the sake of honour There are stories of gods and goddesses Some are tinged with fantasy but all are of past rich in colour and history and have much to offer to the young as well as the old Many of the stories selected are true In villages under the shade of a banyan tree or in a secluded garden there are shrines and tombs to prove that these men and women lived loved and fought and did not die in vain

I wish to thank Shri Hariprasad Dayalal Mehta for his enthusiasm and patience He has a fund of knowledge and did not spare himself in telling me stories and anecdotes about life in Gujarat I would also like to thank the librarians of the Gandhi Smriti Library Bhavnagar and the Barton Library Bhavnagar for their help and co operation

And last but not the least I wish to thank my husband, who read each story and encouraged me when I lost heart

To my daughter Supriya—nine years old—I dedicate this book She has enjoyed many of the stories I hope the other children who read them will also take delight in them like she did

Bhavnagar *Tara Bose*

CONTENTS

1

THE HEROES OF GUJARAT

THE camel plodded slowly, leaving its footprints in the thick layers of dust on the uneven roads The night was dark, and the camel driver and the other passenger sat quietly looking around the country side They were coming from Dholka They stopped near a deserted temple of Shiva and the traveller told the driver to rest "Let us wait here awhile, under the trees You give the camel water and feed it I have to go into the village, and will return soon, do not worry about me if I am delayed"

The traveller was richly attired In his waist he carried a dagger, and slung around his shoulder was his sword He did not want to be recognised, and so he carefully tied a scarf around his beard, pulled his turban to hide his forehead, and covered himself with a white cloth Slowly he proceeded towards the village All around lay destruction Kutab-Ud Din had ransacked and plundered everywhere He sat on a stone parapet and looked sorrowfully around him, recalling the beauty which used to be A herd of buffalo was being driven home

It was dusk, and the cattle were moving softly He went to one of the shepherds and asked—"Where is the house of Devraj Patkil ?" The shepherds pointed out the house, and the traveller walked with them, till they reached the house

Very quietly he went inside In the wind the lamp had gone out The traveller went in and hid behind a big water jar The woman of the house was standing before the fire making some *rotis* from

bajra She was a Rajput, and the years of hard work had not in any way lessened her beauty The flames of the fire danced on her face He wanted to call out to her It was after many years that he was seeing her again, but he changed his mind and decided to wait

Soon he heard horse's hoofs, and Devraj Patkil came in His wife called out to him "Come and eat, the *rotis* are hot '

"Where is Viru ?" he asked

"He must be playing" she replied

"I will wait for him," Devraj said, "I cannot eat without him"

The traveller saw and heard and was deeply touched He had come to the house with the sole intention of killing Devraj Patkil, because the woman was his wife and Viru his own son But now he did not know what he should do He was surprised to see the love and devotion Devraj had for Viru, who was not his own son "Go and bring Viru, then I will eat," Devraj told his wife

She went out calling out "Viru, Viru" Devraj sat quietly deep in thought Suddenly looking up, he saw a shadow on the wall He shouted, "Who are you ?' The traveller stood up, and removed the scarf from his beard, and the white cloth with which he had covered himself You do not recognise me My face is scarred from many battles"

"Lavan Prasad!" exclaimed Devraj

"Yes I am Lavan Prasad I came here to kill you and take my wife and son back but I am defeated,seeing the love and care you give them both She had always wanted a peaceful life My mind is at

peace and I must go" Saying this he returned the sword to its scabbard and made ready to leave Devraj said—"Stay and eat with me and see your son"

"I will stay, but do not tell anyone of the family who I am," said Lavan Prasad



They sat in the darkened courtyard, and the woman came in pulling Viru by the hand 'He did not want to come He is getting so strong I can hardly lift him these days At night he will not sleep until I tell him stories of war and chivalry,' the mother said Viru was a big handsome boy, and with tears in his eyes his father looked at him and touched him on the head

After finishing his food, Lavan Prasad prepared to leave They walked together to the gate "Patan has fallen' Lavan Prasad said "Make my son a brave boy, and when he is old enough send him to me to Dholka' With these words Lavan Prasad returned to the temple of Shiva and mounted his camel "Gujarat

will be re built," he told the camel driver "My son is growing and getting ready "

After spending the night at Viramgam, Lavan Prasad got on his camel and continued his journey to Patan Soon he came to a village Near a pond a family was standing, a mother with six children A horse was tied to a tree The woman—a widow—wa dressed in a very old red sari, which had been patsched several times Her arms did not have any bangles on them

Her three sons were going on a journey "Have you said your prayers ?" the mother asked them "Obev your guru, and look after yourselves" The eldest of the three boys was called Lunig He was sickly, and was interested in sculpture and painting Vastig and Tejig followed They were going to school at Patan "Do not worry about us mother, we will soon be men," the boys replied They spoke to their sisters and asked them to help their mother with the grinding of the wheat, in fetching water from the well and told them to look after her "The sun is rising, and there comes a woman with a water pot on her head All good omens, now begin your journey" The eldest boy Lunig got on the horse, while the other two walked behind The mother watched with tears in her eyes until they were out of sight

Lavan Prasad had been watching this little drama and he came up to the woman and asked her, "Are those your boys ? Where are they going ?" "To Patan to study with a guru,' she said He spurred his camel and soon caught up with the boys

'Where are you going boys ?" he asked them 'We are going to Patan to study literature and sculpture, reading and writing ' they said Lavan Prasad mocked them saying, "Learn literature, but do not learn sword fighting, *lathi* fighting and self-

defence All this is forbidden in your religion You are Jains, and you cannot kill—so learn sculpture" Lavan Prasad glared at the boys, and they who had never seen anyone like him before, ran even faster to keep up with his camel, to talk to him "You should learn how to protect and defend women all you will learn is to wear a red *teeka* on your head and bow to your priest in the temple" The boys were getting angry and said to Lavan Prasad, "We are not going to a temple but to Kumar Deo's Ashram to study "Will they teach you how to wrestle, how to fight with a dagger, and sword fighting, and how to use a bow and arrow ?" "We do not know," one of the boys said "but if they do we would like to learn "No, no, do not learn, this kind of education will make you like me brave in battle but poor, without any money You will not be able to hang lamps outside your house like all the rich people do in Patan,' said Lavan Prasad He continued, "If you study, and learn to write Sanskrit, you will be given honour in the courts of the King Your Sanskrit verses will please the King even if he does not understand what you are saying—even if you abuse Gujarat" The boys were really angry by now and one of them picked up a stone to hit Lavan Prasad But he went on teasing them saying "You are *Baniyas* perhaps you will teach the Kings of Patan to observe *ahimsa* and they will never fight'

Many years passed Tejig (Tejpal) and Vastig (Vastupal) grew into fine men Tejpal went to Dholka where he owned a grocer's shop But he kept himself fit with sword fighting and the practice of archery Vastupal became a scholar He was very wise and able and he became a minister in the court of the King

As this story comes to an end, Gujarat was ruled by Lavan Prasad at Patan In Dholka, Viru, the

son of Lavan Prasad was on the throne Tejpal was sent for by Lavan Prasad to lead an army against the enemies of the King He became a General Gujarat flourished under the rule of these men

2

THE SON

THE village of Chalala was the home of Apa Devat, a notorious robber chief As the story opens, we see him sitting in council, surrounded by the "*Kathis*" of the village One of the men offers him tobacco, the best and most expensive, saying in flattering tones —"Only Apa Devat can do justice to this tobacco" Another stands and presents him with a *hookah*, inlaid with silver and gold work Then someone else offers him a red banner for his horse All these gifts are accepted with a quiet smile Apa Devat looks around, twirling his moustache and thinking no end of himself

Among the crowd—a little aloof sits a Kathi, from another village He watches all this and very quietly asks the man sitting near him—"Since when have the Kathis begun offering gifts and flattering others? Who is Apa Devat?" The man answered saying—"Apa Lakha, you are still a boy Your village has not been plundered by his horses and men If this had happened to you, you would have offered him the best mangoes from your trees" Apa Lakha nodded his head and replied—"No, no, I will never offer anything out of fear to anyone It would be better if my mangoes are eaten by the birds We Kathis are born equal" Apa Devat heard the last few words and cried out angrily—"Who is this who speaks such rash words? Come out and speak up"

"I am Lakha All Kathis are equal I am distressed to see my fellow men offering you gifts out of fear You should be ashamed to accept what they give you" Apa Devat was angry, and he said to

Lakha—"Build a fort around your village to protect it, for I will come and destroy and plunder you, till nothing remains' Lakha said—"You are welcome I am the owner of a small village, and cannot afford to build a fort but I will be prepared to meet you, and will receive you with honours"

Apa Devat accepted the challenge In the meantime the elder member of the group fell at his feet asking him to pardon the words of Lakha, saying he was a young man who was hot headed and did not know what he was saying But Lakha was not afraid and said to Apa Devat—"I confirm my invitation Come when you like The sword belongs to him who wears it with honour" Saying this he got up on his horse and rode away

The name of Lakha s village was known as Lakhapadar It stood on the banks of the river Shel The water flowed over big, black rocks, gurgling happily The soil was rich and flowers bloomed Peacocks roamed around in the fields and sat under the shade of the banyan trees with their beautiful tails spread out Fish danced in the sunlit water of the pond The villagers had built a ' gow mukhi near the banyan tree, and every one drank the fresh clear water The people of this village were happy, brave and kind

When Lakha returned to the village he told his brothers what had happened, and asked them to keep themselves in readiness for the visit of Apa Devat Months passed, and Apa Devat did not come Everyone thought that either he was afraid or had forgotten about the challenge One day Lakha had to leave the village and go to Chalala on some business He remained out for the night On that very night Apa Devat and his men plundered the village of Lakhapadar The villagers put up a brave fight with their spears but they were powerless against the band of fierce robbers on their swift horses

After Apa Devat had ransacked the village, killing many, he went to the house of Lakha, and called out to him—"Kathi come out It was you who challenged me Why do you hide now ?" His wife hearing these words came out and said—"Apa Devat, if Kathi had been here, he would have met you on the opposite side of the river Shel He would never have hidden from you" Saying this she went inside

All this time, Heerbai, the fifteen year old daughter of Lakha was standing near the door, leaning against the pillar of the house She saw the fierce look in the eyes of the robber chief, the blood stained spear in his hand, and watched the horse on which he sat, foaming at the mouth But she was not afraid Suddenly Devat saw a little colt grazing in the shade of a tree It was a very beautiful animal So Devat thought he would take it away and show the surrounding villages how he had defeated Lakha, and also got a new colt He got down from his horse and rested the spear against a tree, and bent down to unite the colt Heerbai realised that this was her only chance to save the honour of her father, and she must not lose any time In a flash she picked up the spear and with all her strength plunged it into the back of Apa Devat, thereby pinning him down to the ground

In the meantime the robber gang thinking their leader had gone ahead, left the village and rode away towards the forest, where they were supposed to meet after the raid

The news of the plundering of his village had by now reached Apa Lakha He was ashamed and unhappy, and did not want to return to the village He felt that it was he who had brought trouble to his own village, and he had not been there to protect it In the meanwhile, Heerbai had sent a messenger to her father to ask him to come home immediately He then realised that his daughter must

have good reason to send for him, and so rode home as fast as he could

On reaching home, his daughter took him to the garden, and uncovered the white cloth with which she had covered the body of Apa Devat Apa Lakha was astonished, and overjoyed. He blessed Heerbai, and touching her on her head said—"Everyone says I have only a daughter, but today, through your courage and bravery, you have proved that you are also my son"

3

THE MAGNIFICENT TWELVE

IN the village of Ambardi in Surat lived twelve men, who were very good friends. The chief of this band was known as Vasal Rabo. Vasal Rabo owned seven villages. He was much respected. The villagers used to say of him that he had surely been blest by the Goddess because he would not bow down to any man. He held his head high and was not afraid of anyone.

One day the twelve men got together, and their chief Vasal Rabo told them—"Let us live together in peace, and when the time comes we will also die to gether." Standing in a closely knit group, they vowed to do what their leader said. They went about their own business—some farming, others selling, some tilling the soil.

The King, who ruled in Ahmedabad at that time, was told by one of his courtiers—"You have conquered all the corners of Surat, but there is one man who does not bow to you in respect." "Who is this man?" the King asked, rather surprised. "He owns seven villages, amongst them the village of Ambardi." The King began to stroke his beard thoughtfully, and asked the courtier—"What is the strength of his army?" "He has no army, sire," the courtier replied, "but twelve followers. His strength is in God—so he says—and his pride is boundless."

The King was angry, and wanted to see for himself who this famous man was who boasted so much. With his army he came to the outskirts of the village

of Ambardi and pitched his camp One of his men went to the village to call Vasal Rabo Vasal Rabo at that time was ploughing in the fields He was carrying a *trishul* in one hand and there was a dagger in his belt His hair was long, and he wore a turban around his head The messenger arrived and told him—"The King is camping outside your village, and wishes to see you" Vasal Rabo told the messenger—"As a king he is not important, but as my guest he will be treated like a king Tell him I am coming"

He tied his oxen and gave them hay to eat He changed his clothes and went to the court of the King The King sat on his throne surrounded by his courtiers and officers The leading business men of Surat were also there, offering their services In the meantime Vasal Rabo (a humble farmer) appeared before the King He pulled out his sword and putting it down before the King saluted him The King was annoyed his nostrils quivered and he asked—Whom did you salute?' 'I saluted the spirit within me," he replied coolly "Don't you bow your head to the King?" he asked, angered greatly No, No, Sire, I do not bow to anyone, but I pray to my God that he may bless you and give you a long life" Vasal Rabo replied "Why don t you bow down?", the King asked again "Why should one man bow down to another? Only two are worth bowing down to—Allah and my Goddess We are brothers and should meet as equals The King listened in amazement to the wise and true words of the simple farmer, and his heart was moved But before his court he had to show his power So he said with great authority—'Bow your head or accept war'

"I accept war but listen to me great King You have a huge army at your command, and guns and cannons We are only twelve with one weapon

each So do not use your guns against us " The King realised that he had made a mistake Twelve unarmed men against hundreds of horsemen—this would be pure murder He decided to move his camp behind the village so that when the little band appeared their backs would be turned against the King s army In that case the King could cancel the orders of war, since they did not meet face to face

In the meantime one of the villagers had come and told Vasal Rabo that the camp had changed its position So the villag rs broke down the wall and the eleven men dressed for battle, and carrying a spear or a sword appeared One of the men—Tej Rao—was out of the village so could not join in the battle The men stood together and Vasal Rabo said—' I am drawing a circle with my spear At the end of the day when the sun has set and the battle is over, you all must return to the circle Now prepare for death, for surely we will all be killed " They prayed and asked for strength to fight to the end They then rode on their horses and began to attack "One against hundred" they cried, but they were undaunted The battle continued long and hard Many men of the King's army were routed, and Vasal Rabo and his men kept fighting, in spite of many wounds

Eventually the King realised that there was some other power with these men as otherwise it would not have been possible for them to fight with so much strength So he asked his men to begin firing Vasal Rabo realised now that there was no more chance for survival So he rounded up his men and slowly, bleeding from every limb they proceeded to the circle They sank down exhausted

By evening Tej Rao returned, and saw that funeral pyres were being lit for his comrades who

had all b en killed in battle As the flames rose high into the evening sky, taking away the bodies of the eleven men, he rushed into the flames and he too was cremated with the rest He remembered the pledge they had taken—' We will live together and die together "

4

AAI JASAL

TO DAY, near Jamnagar in the Baradi district, a traveller may find a little shrine dedicated to the memory of Aai Jasal She lived some hundred years ago, but her story is true and some of the old men and women of the village of Baradi where she lived still sing of her There are many stories of her and many songs

Jasal, was the second of the two wives of Dhano Bhed, a *Charan* by caste She was young and very beautiful There was a delicacy about her which was the envy of the Charan's first wife One morning she was at the well to fetch water A traveller on a horse stopped by the well and said to her—"Will you please give my horse some water to drink ?" Jasal drew water from the well and gave it to the horse till it s thirst was quenched

The name of the traveller was Ladhwa He was returning to the village of Kuchri Having accepted the kindness of the girl he felt he should repay her So from his bag he took out some money and said to the girl—"I am your brother please accept this little token of gratitude"

Jasal said to him—"Since you have called yourself my brother, I will accept your gift, only if vou will come to my house and have a meal, before you go any further"

Ladhwa did not want to go, but since she was so insistent, he went along, following slowly behind her Arriving at the house he tied the horse outside

to a tree, and went inside, and sat down She gave him some *rotis* made from bajra, a glass of milk and jaggery After he had finished, Ladhwa asked her, "How can I repay your kindness?" Aai Jasal said to him—"Remember that you are my brother, and when I send for you please come I do not have anyone alive no parents, no brothers or sisters' Saying this she touched him on the head and blessed him

Punasri, the jealous wife, spread a rumour around the entire village that her husband s second wife was entertaining a stranger when the husband was away All the women of the village got together and whispered and gossiped and spread untrue stories about Aai Jasal

When the husband returned, he stopped first at the house of Punasri for a glass of water Punasri told him about Aai Jasal This made him very angry He was very tired Hearing the tale about his wife whom he loved dearly, he felt ashamed He picked up a whip and went to the house Jasal was eagerly waiting for her husband She was standing in the garden when she saw him approach, whip in hand Everyone else had followed to see the fun He approached his wife and without saying anything began to whip her She was a delicate woman and the lashes of the whip cut into her fair skin, and blood began to pour out In the mean time Punasri said to her—"You have shamed us before the village ' Then Jasal realised what had happened, and why she was being beaten before all the members of the village She closed her eyes, folded her hands and called out to her God—"Prove to them that I am innocent, and take me away from this world, oh my God "

Suddenly she began to shiver and *kumkum* began pouring out of her eyes Her wounds got healed

and her face and expression looked unearthly in their beauty

Everyone was astounded, and moved back Some lent forward and touched her feet, others bowed to her with folded hands and said "Mother, forgive us" Aai Jasal said to somebody standing near her, "Go to the village of Kuchri and fetch my brother Tell him to come soon, and bring with him some pure ghee and a *chunari*"

Hearing the news, Ladhwa got what she had asked of him Mounting the swiftest camel, he hurried to be near his sister In the meantime the village was astir with the drone of the *shehnai*, and the beat of the drums Processions of the sick, the lame and the blind came to touch the feet of Aai Jasal On touching them they were healed The childless came for her blessing The old and infirm came for strength She touched, she blessed, she spoke to others, but everyone who came to her got what he desired

As Ladhwa approached, he saw all this, and followed the procession to the pyre of sandalwood where she would burn herself As she climbed the steps, fire appeared from her toes, consuming her She called out to her brother Ladhwa, and said to him, "Pour the *ghee* over me, and cover me with the *chunari*" He went to her but the flames did not touch him He went close to her and she blessed him Then he poured the ghee over her and covered her face with the *chunari* He stood there unharmed whilst the red flames rose high into the sky, taking with it, the pure heart of Aai Jasal

5

THE DONKEY

UP in the heavens, God Indra was holding court There was music and one of the most beautiful of the celestial dancers was dancing Lord Indra enjoyed her dance and thought he would please Lord Shiva by sending her to him He called her after she had finished, and said to her—"Go to Lord Shiva on Mount Kailash and show him how beautifully you dance I am sure he will be well pleased with you" So the girl set out on her long journey

On the way, Indra s son met her and was struck by her beauty, and called out to her, Mohini where are you going ? ' I am going to Mount Kailash to Lord Shiva to dance for him I have been sent there by your father, Mohini replied But Indra s son took her to his palace and she remained there After some time Indra met Shiva and enquired after the dancer, asking him whether he had enjoyed the dancing Lord Shiva shook his head and said—"No one came to me to dance, Lord Indra" Indra was very annoyed and sent for Mohini, who told him the whole story Indra sent for his son and told him in angry tones— Since you have disobeyed my orders and displeased Lord Shiva I will curse you and send you down to earth where you will remain a donkey ' On hearing this the son fell on his knees and begged forgiveness, but his father would not relent Lord Shiva took pity on the boy and said—' I cannot remove the curse from you, but I can give you a little help—you will be a donkey all day, but at night you will become your own self You will marry a princess, and when she has a son, the curse will leave you and you will return to heaven"

Indra s son came down to earth as a donkey, to the house of a potter One night he woke the potter from his sleep and told him—"Do not sleep any more Your fate is now changed Go and tell the king to give his daughter in marriage to your donkey," This went on every night The donkey would keep on worrying the poor, tired potter The potter was a simple man, and could not imagine himself going to his king So he went to the Dewan and told him what the donkey had been saying The Dewan came to the home of the potter, and again the donkey repeated the same thing So the Dewan reported the matter to the king The next day the king also came This time the donkey said, "I know that the king and his minister have come to listen to me Give me your daughter in marriage, otherwise your town will be buried I will do whatever you wish, but you must listen to me" The king was clever and said to the donkey—"If you can build a copper fort with silver gates, around this town, I will give you my daughter'



Indra's son called out to Vishwakarma, and with his help completed the fort with the silver gates The next morning the city was shining in the sun The king agreed to the wedding of his daughter, and also gave them a small palace to live in One day the mother of the princess went to see her daughter, and asked her how she could possibly be happy married to a donkey The daughter said—"Do not worry mother, I am very happy, come in the evening and see for yourself" So the mother returned and as she entered the palace gates she saw the dead donkey lying near the gate, and when she entered the room she saw her daughter talking to a tall, handsome prince ! The mother thought that if the body of the donkey were destroyed for ever, the young prince would never be able to return to it and would remain a prince She called the servants of the palace and told them to burn the body of the donkey

Indra's son told his wife, "I feel someone is burning my body A grave mistake has been committed I will now go back to the heavens and will never return You should leave this city, as tomorrow the whole place will be buried and ruined" Saying this he went away The next day, the whole city shook, and fire and water appeared destroying everything All the people were killed The princess escaped in time

After many years a new town sprang up on the ruins of this old city, and came to be known as Cambay

6

THE STORY OF THE TWINS

ONCE upon a time, a very long time ago, in Gujarat, there lived a king named Vijaypal He had six queens but none of them had any children The King had no heir to his throne, and this was a worry to him.

One day, one of his ministers came to him to say that there was a very beautiful young woman, who belonged to a poor home He wanted to know whether the King would consider her as his seventh wife The King agreed and married Suman and she had twins—one girl and one boy

When the babies were born the King had gone out of his kingdom The jealous wives took the babies away and instead put two puppies into Suman's bed The King returned and seeing the pups was very angry He banished the minister who had arranged his marriage, and also poor Suman and her mother

The wicked queens put the newly born babies into a wooden box and floated it down the river Shetrunji One morning a hermit who lived in the forest on the banks of the river, came down to bathe and found the box which had been washed up on the shore with the tide Opening it he found the babies He took them home and nursed them tenderly He named the boy Dilaram and the girl Chandrika The hermit taught the young prince how to hunt with a bow and arrow He taught them both how to read and write, and told them about the rivers and mountains and the land in which they lived He also told them how he had found them

The years went by and both the prince and princess grew up The hermit had become old and he knew that he would soon die He called the children to his bedside and told them that he must now leave them, but gave them a small earthen pot saying,

"Whenever you may want food this pot will give it to you, and you will never be hungry'

He also gave them two gems telling them that if they rubbed them, two fairies would appear and fulfil every wish

The hermit died soon after The young prince and princess rubbed the gems and two fairies appeared

"Take us back to the land of our birth,'

they ordered and a flying chariot appeared with two white horses Soon they found themselves flying amidst the clouds and arrived in Patan With the help of the fairies Chandrika and Dilaram built themselves a beautiful palace and lived in great splendour

After some time Dilaram paid a visit to the King to seek his permission to give a feast for all the citizens of Patan

"Will your Highness also consent to grace the feast with your courtiers ?

The King was charmed by the courtesy of Dilaram and consented to come

Everyone was invited whether he be rich or poor The food was plentiful The pot which the hermit had given them fulfilled every wish and the guests had plenty to eat There was music as well and Chandrika sang some of the songs the old hermit had taught her

The King was very pleased and asked Dilaram who he was and where his parents were Dilaram in reply, told the King that he did not know who his parents were, but that he and his sister had been found on the banks of the river Shetrunji, by an old hermit, who had brought them up

The King returned to his palace and sent for his ministers He told them that he would reward them if they could find out the history of the brother and sister The ministers went in search and in due course came across the maid servant who used to look after Suman, the King's seventh queen, who had been banished from the kingdom

Champa, the maid servant, was now very old and frightened, and would not at first say anything But being promised gold she told the ministers the whole story, and begged for mercy

The King was overjoyed to hear from his ministers the real story of Dilaram and Chandrika He sent for Suman from her banishment and brought them all back to the palace He held a durbar and proclaimed Suman, the rightful queen, and Dilaram, the heir to his throne

There was much rejoicing in the land, and everyone was happy with their new queen, and the young prince and princess

7

THE STORY OF THE BRAVE ARAB

UNDER the shade of a large banyan tree near a well, sat two travellers One was a *Baniya*—dressed in a white *kurta* and *dhoti*, the other an Arab soldier The Arab was dressed in tight *churidar* pyjamas with a loose shirt He wore a red turban There was a sash around his waist, which was embroidered In this he had kept his small dagger A gun was hung around his shoulder The Arab's horse had a richly embroidered saddle and a red scarf hanging loose around its neck

The Baniya took out his food and offered some to the Arab But the Arab had already eaten and so declined the offer They sat and chatted awhile and during the course of their conversation found, they were going to Khopala—a village some miles away The Baniya was much relieved to have found a companion as he was carrying gold coins and ornaments worth five thousand rupees for his daughter

"Have you got any money with you ? ", asked the Arab "This country is not very safe, so if you are carrying any give it to me, it will be safer with me" But the Baniya shook his head and said

"No, I do not have anything with me "

Both of them continued their journey on horseback through forests and low hills It was very lonely They did not talk much Suddenly in the distance they saw some horsemen The Arab recognised them as a band of robbers, who used to roam the countryside plundering travellers But the Arab

was not afraid, as he was not carrying anything of value But the Baniya was terrified

"What are we going to do?" he asked the Arab "Why are you afraid ? We have no money with us and so they will not harm us," replied the Arab

"I have coins and ornaments worth five thousand rupees," said the Baniya

"Why did you tell me a lie earlier on when I asked you ?", the Arab asked angrily "Now give me the valuables and you ride away quickly into the next village," the Arab told the Baniya The Baniya handed over the things and rode away

In the meantime the robbers had seen the Baniya give something to the Arab, and the head of the band approached the Arab and said to him,

"We know that you have something with you Hand it over to us and we will spare your life Otherwise you will be killed." But the Arab refused to part with the things and said to Gigoshiar, the chief of the band,

"The valuables do not belong to me They are my companion's and as he has entrusted them to my care I cannot give them to you' Saying this the Arab rode away In the distance the band of robbers followed, wondering what they should do They were armed with bows and arrows, whilst the Arab had a gun They were afraid, in spite of being so many against one man The Arab also knew that he only had one bullet in his gun He had to save it till it was really needed, as otherwise he would be killed As they neared the village they began showering him with arrows The Arab removed the arrows from his body, and then took out his gun and fired the last bullet killing the brother of the chief of the robbers. The rest he tackled with his dagger and killed three Soon the rest of them disappeared

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The Arab stopped near a river and got off from his horse and washed the blood from his body He then continued slowly into the village of Ankaria The village headman was sitting in council with the rest of the villagers, and when the Arab approached, the headman, Vikhabhai, came up to him and seeing that he wes wounded, took him into his house and gave him shelter Later that evening Gigoshiar, the robber chief, came to the villag. and said to Vikhabhai,

"The Arab has killed my brother We now demand him, so that he may also die We will burn down your village if you do not hand him over to us"

"We are sixty strong in the village, so we can defend ourselves Do what you may, but we will not hand over the Arab to you, since he came to us for shelter, ' Vikhabhai said

The robbers rode away and the Arab remained with Vikhabhai till he was better

Soon the Arab was well enough to ride again and continue on his journey to Baroda, which was his destination Vikhabhai asked him, 'Have you any money with you ? ' The Arab replied "No" So the headman gave him some money and accompanied him into the town In the town they met the Baniya who had given up hope of recovering his gold ornaments He was overjoyed and opening the box of gold coins gave the Arab five rupees as a reward The Arab returned the money, saying that he did not want it Vikhabhai in anger and disgust took off his shoe and threw it at the Baniya saying to him, "This man risked his life for your five thousand rupees and all you offer him is five rupees!"

The Arab thanked Vikhabhai for everything and continued to Baroda where he was employed by the

Raja there One day the Baniya who used to work for the King had to go and bring back his wife from her father's house The Baniya approached the Raja and asked him to send a guard with him to escort his wife The Arab was asked to go On their return journey the Baniya and his wife were travelling in two separate chariots The Baniya went on ahead followed by his wife They came to a well and the Baniya's wife wanted water to drink and asked the Arab to go and fetch some for her The Arab said to her "I cannot leave you and go down to the well. There are many steps to the bottom The country is deserted and it will not be safe to leave you alone,' But the woman was thirsty and said to the Arab, "Nothing will happen in a few minutes I will be safe Please fetch the water, as I am very thirsty' So the Arab left his gun on the second step and walked down to the well as quickly as he could to get the water When he came up, he found the chariot driver shouting as if he had gone mad. The gun had disappeared as had also the Baniya's wife The driver told him that a couple of Sindhis had come on a camel and taken away the woman and also his gun. The Arab was most unhappy He realised that he was useless without his gun, and did not know what to do Suddenly a Rajput rode by and asked the Arab what had happened The Arab told his story and the Rajput gave him his gun The Arab, overjoyed, rode away as fast as he could.

Soon he caught up with the camel and saw the Baniya's wife in between the driver of the camel and the Sindhi. This worried him as he did not quite know how to approach the camel and shoot without injuring the Baniya's wife The camel driver in the meantime turned his camel to one side to see if the Arab was following them. This gave the Arab the opportunity he was looking for He first shot the camel driver and then the other man. They both

fell down and he rescued the woman and took her safely back to the palace

The Raja was very pleased with the Arab and honoured him by making him one of his personal bodyguards

8

BHIMO JAT—THE OUTLAW

IN a village in the district of Gondal there lived four brothers They were farmers, who cultivated a few acres of land The eldest of the brothers was known as Bhimo Jat One day an Inspector came to the village and said to Bhimo Jat that his land would have to be handed back to the Thakur Sahib of Gondal "Why must our land be taken away ?" asked the brothers "Because you give shelter to the dacoits," the Inspector replied "We give shelter to the dacoits and robbers, because otherwise they terrorise us, and kidnap our children You do not give us any protection What else can we do ?" Bhimo Jat asked The Inspector went and reported the matter to the Thakur Sahib and he sent an army of soldiers and took away the land Bhimo Jat told the Inspector—"You have taken away food from our mouths How are we going to survive, and feed our wives and children ?" Bhimo Jat and his brothers wondered what they should do It was decided that his wife and children should go and live with her brother, and the four of them would raise a small band of followers and fight the Thakur Sahib of Gondal

Bhim Jat was very tall and handsome He had dark shining eyes, and against his fair complexion, his black beard and moustache looked very fierce He used to wear a *Surwal* and a coloured turban Around his waist there was a dagger tucked in the waistband He carried a sword The four brothers rode together and arrived on the banks of the river Bhadeer As the sun set, they knelt down to pray

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Bhimo Jat said, "Mother Earth, if I have cultivated my land and earned my bread honestly, please help me, otherwise destroy me completely " Saying this they picked up a handful of earth and blessed themselves They rode into a village and collected a band of men and some horsemen as well

Their first dacoity was in the village of Don They plundered the village and then sent a message to the Thakur Sahib to send his army against them The army came within a few days There were many hundreds against the small band of Bhimo Jat s men but the forces of the Thakur Sahib were defeated

It came to pass that a goldsmith's son was getting married The procession consisting of three bullock carts was travelling through the villages The women inside the carts were singing loudly Some shepherds approached the carts and said to them—' Why are you singing so loudly ? If Bhimo Jat should hear you he will never spare you ' The women replied, shaking their heads, Bhimo Jat will never attack a marriage procession The bullock carts went on their way Evening came and they had to pass through a forest As they neared a well five people sprang up from behind some low bushes They stopped the cart and told them to hand over all the ornaments they possessed The bridegroom was richly attired, so the father took off everything and gave them to one of the men "Who are you", asked the goldsmith The men replied "We are Bhimo Jat s men " The goldsmith shook his head sadly and said—"Bhimo Jat never used to attack marriage parties nor did he ever harm anyone Please let me go in peace to the wedding and on the way back you may take everything you want " The dacoits agreed and let them go On the third day the marriage party was returning, and Bhimo Jat met them and gave the goldsmith a gold bangle for his new daughter-in law The goldsmith was frightened

and said—"If the police see this bangle they will arrest me, for they will wonder where I got it from" Bhimo Jat smiled and said —"All we have is loot and plunder, nothing belongs to us" He took back the bangle and instead gave them some money The procession went on its way

Bhimo Jat and his men plundered villages for food But he never harmed anyone nor did he hold prisoners to ransom He was an honourable man, much loved by his friends and feared by his enemies The hiding place of this small band of outlaws was on top of a mountain One morning he and his friend were watching the road below They were unprepared for any police attack In a cave at the bottom of the hill some outlaws were guarding their arms and ammunition

Suddenly Bhimo Jat saw a whole army approaching him It seemed to him that all the trees and rocks had come to life Holding his sword in his hand he started to move backwards Someone shouted from below—"Bhimo do not retreat, come forward" His friend realising that all was lost begged Bhimo to escape, but he was not willing to do so He said—"I will not go back I have already ruined my life by being a dacoit let me not spoil my death I will die with courage You escape while you can" Raising his sword above his head, Bhimo Jat shouted out—"You are five hundred, we are only two so fight with swords We will not win but let us show you what bravery is Saying this the two friends rushed towards the army Bhimo Jat and his friend put up a gallant fight, killing many The leader of the army had promised not to use bullets, but seeing so many of his men killed he ordered his men to fire, and the guns boomed out—a hundred against two men The body of Bhimo Jat was riddled with bullets He fell back and dying said—"You have played me false"

The grave of Bhimo Jat—outlaw, robber chief, but gallant soldier—lies under the shade of a tree, on the top of a small mountain in the district of Baibara near Gondal The stories of his daring, courage and many exploits were told by his grandsons He is still thought of with pride by the people of his village

9

THE STORY OF A DEER

THE town of Palitana stood on the banks of the river Shetrunji Palitana used to attract many pilgrims, because of a certain holy banyan tree The people believed that Shiva lived in this tree, and anyone desiring anything would have his wish fulfilled if he prayed to the holy spirit of Shiva who lived there

In the village there lived a man called Narpatiya, with his wife and four children He was very poor, and very often he would go to the banyan tree and with folded hands, beseech Lord Shiva to make him rich Narpatiya used to make his living by performing small plays and singing on the streets At night he would take his bow and arrow and go into the forest to hunt for food for his family One night he did not get any food So he felt ashamed to go home Instead he decided to remain in the forest for the night Being afraid of the many wild animals, Narpatiya climbed on to a tree and settled himself amidst the leafy branches

Suddenly in the middle of the night he was awoken by bright lights, and saw seven men carrying flaming torches The men made signs with their hands and more people appeared Soon the forest became a busy city Markets sprang up and in the many villages bullocks ploughed the fields Horsemen rode to and fro, and in the village square where the men had erected a golden throne, there was singing and dancing Everyone was happy and there was no hunger In the midst of all this merry making

a deer walked slowly and sat down on the throne The people bowed to it

Narpatiya wondered whether all this was true. Perhaps he had been dreaming, for at the first light of dawn everything disappeared He came down from his tree and looked around for any signs of what he had seen but there was nothing He went home and told his wife but she would not believe him So the next night he took her with him and they both hid in the tree The same performance repeated itself The worried couple decided that it would be wise to go and tell King Bahadur Singh, and inform him of these strange happenings, for they were afraid of some kind of disaster

They arrived at the court of the King Truthfully they told him all they had seen The King decided to go and see for himself whether all this was a fact or just fantasy They arrived in the forest and hid in the same tree After midnight the same seven men appeared carrying flaming torches, and the whole forest came to life, in the same way As dawn broke the deer started to walk away and the King from the tree, shot an arrow and the deer fell and died The city remained, but the music stopped and from the heavens a chariot appeared, and messengers from the sky stopped to pick up the dead body of the deer The King came down and questioned the people who were taking away the deer—"Why are you taking away the deer ? Who are you ?" 'We have come from the court of Indra The deer is the son of Indra, and because of a curse, has been a deer all this time It was destined that he would be killed by the arrow of King Bahadur Singh and lose his curse, so he could return to the court of Indra " Saying this they picked up the deer and were gone

The King went to the throne and sat down He called Narpatiya and said to him—"I would like to reward you, what is it you, want ?' Narpatiya replied, "If I had shot the deer all these cities and the wealth would rightfully be mine It was I who showed you this and so all this b longs to me,



Great King" The King was wise and just He stepped down from the throne, and asked Narpatiya to sit there For a while he was pleased, but again a cloud passed over his face and the King asked him, "Why are you sorrowful again ? You have all you asked for" "I belong to a humble community, sire," Narpatiya said "The other kings of the neighbouring lands will not recognise me, for I am not known anywhere" The King said to him 'I will give you my daughter in marriage so you will be uplifted from your lowly status There will not be any reason to feel ignored after that"

So Narpatiya the street performer, married the daughter of King Bahadur Singh and achieved fame, wealth and happiness !

10

RUPALI BA

IN days gone by in Gujarat, travelling was done by road There were camels and chariots were pulled either by bullocks or horses Journeys took a long time and there was always the danger of robbers and bands of plunderers, who used to attack helpless women and take away their jewels

For this reason every village used to have men who were by profession 'escorts They used to escort marriage parties from one village to another and also women going or coming from their homes to stay with their parents or in laws These men would also help out in shopping for weddings, and do any other work asked of them

Famous among these 'escorts' was one known as Gema He had earned a name for himself as being very courageous and brave, and all the robber gangs had only to hear his name and they would run away But as the days went along he became very vain, and too sure of himself He would not undertake small jobs, but only those which were worthy of his name He used to go around telling everyone—

"Don t you know who I am? Have you not heard of Gema, the brave and the all powerful ?"

One day, he was sent out to a village about ten miles away to escort a young Rajput woman back to her father s house in Pachegaon

Rupali Ba had recently got married, and she was expecting her first child In her father in law's

house the auspicious ceremonies had been carried out, and she was dressed in new garments, and precious ornaments adorned her arms, neck and body She was now ready to leave for her father's house

The country through which she had to travel was all desert Except for a few bushes, nothing grew there The land was deserted Rupali Ba travelled in one chariot pulled by bullocks, and in other one was Gema and also two large casks the of water

As night approached, Gema fell off to sleep The bullock cart driver nudged him several timse and said—

"Wake up, wake up, night is here, it is not safe to sleep"

Half asleep Gema mumbled, "Why are you afraid? I am Gema Nothing can happen You keep quiet and drive your cart' Runali Ba sat quietly behind her purdah of muslim curtain and called out to Gema saying—"Do not sleep Gema, you must keep watch now, for the night is dark and very lonely ' But Gema was not bothered and he kept on sleeping and snoring very loudly Suddenly the bullock cart driver pushed Gema and said— "Wake up Gema, I can see lights shining in the distance You better get prepared to look after the safety of the lady"

But Gema snored away, mumbling once in a while—"I am Gema, remember I am Geema '

The lights came nearer and nearer The drivers of the carts were very afraid, but could do nothing Then a dozen armed men appeared and surrounded the carts, They first caught Gema and tied his

arms and legs and then tied him with a stick beneath his knees like a ball This is known as *Rangotilo* They pushed him on the sand, and he went rolling away over the desert till he got stuck amidst some bushes Then the head of the gang approached Rupali Ba and asked her to hand over her ornaments to him She was carrying a box of jewels which she gave It was the custom and a matter of honour even amongst thieves never to remove the ornaments from a woman s body But this robber chief did not care for those customs and said to Rupali Ba—

"Take off all your jewels from your body, and hand them over even the silver anklets which you are wearing" Rupali Ba took off whatever she had on and handed them over, but said—

"The anklets have been made at Naredi and the silver is strong and pure I am with child and do not have the strength to remove them myself But you may take them off yourself, if you so wish" Saying this she pushed her two feet out of the curtains surrounding her Two of the robbers began pulling the anklets from her feet but they would not come off In the meantime Rupali Ba looked around her inside the cart and found two heavy poles Taking one in both her hands she hit the bent heads of the two robbers who were busily trying to remove her anklets Their skulls broke and they died Rupali Ba forgot she was a woman, and climbed out of her cart, and attacked the other men with the huge pole, turning it around and around She was only eighteen, but it seemed that the Goddess Chandika had come to her aid and with fire in her eyes she fought like a brave Rajput woman She was wounded, but she went on, till at last the robber chief taking the few men who survived, fled into the desert

Gema, in the meantime had managed to untie

the ropes which bound him, and he too disappeared, feeling too ashamed to show himself

Rupali Ba bade the bullock carts to go on and she followed behind, carrying one of the swords which she had picked up from the dacoits She came to a village which belonged to her uncle He came to meet her and offered her some *Kasumba*—a drink made from opium, thinking it might help her to forget her pain, and she walked on to her father s house

On arriving at her home, she was very tired She had lost a lot of blood She died soon after

The courage of Rupali Ba, the young Rajput girl is still recalled in the villages There are songs about her and her brave fight with the robber chief and his band.

11

FOUR RIDDLES

IN the centre of a big market place there was a little shrine, where *ghee* lamps used to burn night and day Next to the shrine was a betel nut shop The regular customers were people from the palace, who used to come very often to buy the different varieties of 'pan' the shop keeper used to make Every day at the same time a woman would be seen at the shop buying pan worth one gold coin She never bargained about the price, but paid the coin The shop keeper wondered who this beautiful woman was He sent for a Brahmin and told him to find out The next day as she was leaving the pan shop the Brahmin followed her She went into a forest, and arrived at the foot of a mountain, where there was a cave She entered the cave, and the Brahmin followed, and they arrived in a big and beautifully decorated city which looked like Indrapuri, the celestial city of God Indra

There were many other women more beautiful than the one he had followed, and he was very curious to know who they were He went up to one of the women and asked her—"Who are you all ? Where is your Queen, Abola Rani ?" The woman replied—"Because you are a Brahmin we are not going to insult you, but go away, or we will lock you up in the prison The Brahmin insisted saying, "I am not going till I have seen Abola Rani so go and ask her, whether she will see me " The woman replied—"We are all maids of the Queen The Queen lives behind four curtains, and does not show herself to any man So you d better go away " The maid went to the Queen and told her about the

Brahmin She was very angry and told the maid to put the Brahmin into the nearby lake The maid asked the Brahmin to have a bath before he went before the Queen The moment he touched the he water, was drowned He appeared after a while and found himself near the pan shop

It was mid night and all the shops were closed The Brahmin sat outside the pan shop thinking about the events of the day Suddenly the King appeared on horseback, and the Brahmin bowed to him The Brahmin told the King the story of the city inside the cave The King was curious and asked the Brahmin to take him there When they arrived, the women were filling water from the well King Vikram asked the girls—"Whose town is this and what are all these wonders which I see before my eyes ?" The girls realised that this was no ordinary man and took him to their Queen's palace The chief maid asked him—"Who are you ?" "I am King Vikram", he said The maid said to the King, "The Queen is surrounded by four curtains, and if before dawn you can remove them you will be able to see her If you fail, you will be put into prison " "Who is Abola Rani ?", the King asked The maid "Once upon a time the Goddesses were playing and said they made some dolls When the game was over they did not want to part with the dolls, and so they gave them life The Goddess sent another doll—the Queen—to look after the other dolls This Queen is Abola Rani She speaks to no man, You have till dawn to try and make her speak to you"

The King said, "I will tell you a story, and the Queen must say 'yes', to all I say" But the Queen did not agree So Vikram said, "Well if the Queen will not speak, perhaps her ear rings will answer for her " Everyone burst out laughing at this strange request But the ear-rings replied—"We are listening good King and we will answer you" The King began his story

"In the village of Melapur-Patan there lived four boys One was a Brahmin, the other a Rajput, the third a Baniya, and the fourth a weaver They were good friends and played together all day Their parents used to say that if they did not work, they would starve to death One day the four of them decided to leave the village and go out into the world and learn a trade So without telling anyone they disappeared They walked till nightfall and came to a village and rested there in the house of a goldsmith The goldsmith offered one of the boys to teach him his trade, so the Baniya remained behind and the other three carried on their journey The next halt was in the home of a carpenter Here too one of the boys stayed behind to learn carpentry, and the other two went on In the next village they spent the night in the home of a weaver, an old kindly man He offered to teach one of the two boys how to weave cloth and so he stayed on The Brahmin who was the only one left, carried on The Brahmin travelled all alone till he came to an *ashram* which was on the banks of a river Here he remained for twelve years, learning the prayers and the different forms of worship from his Teacher

After twelve years the Brahmin set out to look for his companions He began to walk back along the same route and gradually the four friends got together, and decided that it was time to return home to their village On the way back they halted in a forest for the night Since it was dark and lonely, they said they should keep watch So the four of them divided the night into four vigils, and each one kept watch in turn First it was the carpenter s turn to watch, and so he thought he would work He carved a doll out of wood The next to keep watch was the weaver and he sat and wove beautiful garments for the doll The third was the goldsmith He made ornaments and adorned the doll When he fell asleep, the Brahmin had to keep guard

Seeing the doll dressed and adorned, he thought to himself--"Everyone has shown their skill All I can do now, is to give it life" So saying some prayers, he sprinkled some water on the doll and immediately it came to life, in the shape of a beautiful young woman In the morning the boys began fighting over her, each claiming her for himself

So ended King Vikram's story He questioned the ear-rings "Tell me to whom does the woman belong?" The ear rings answered "She belongs to whomsoever gave her life' At this the Queen exclaimed angrily -"Shame on you! You are not fit to be worn by me,' and she took off the ear rings and threw them on the ground The Queen replied "The giver of life is God The one who made it becomes the father, the one who dressed it is the brother, but the one who adorned her is the rightful husband The woman belongs to the goldsmith" On hearing this King Vikram smiled and said - 'Your spell has been broken you have spoken, and so yoy must remove one of the curtains surrounding you"

King Vikram told the Queen another story

"Once there lived in a village, a King and a Queen, who were very happy Their only sorrow was that they had no son So they used to pray every day in the temple of Shiva and one day Lord Shiva was pleased with them and gave them a son When the son was twelve years old, the King realised that he was dying He made his son promise that no matter what happened he would always perform this special offering to Shiva The king died The Prince grew up and got married Owing to the time being inauspicious the new Princess could not return with the Prince to his kingdom and remained at her father s place The Prince returned after some time to fetch her This time he travelled with another friend of his who was the son of the minister of his

court On the way they came to a Shiva temple and near it was a lake where some lotus flowers bloomed The Prince went to the lake and plucked some blossoms and worshipped at the temple, offering the flowers He promised himself that on his return journey he would offer more lotus flowers to the image of Shiva

He over stayed in his father in law s house During the return journey, the lake near the temple was dry, and there were no flowers there He did not know what he should do He sat for some time in the temple, and then bowing his head in front of the image cut off his head as an offering The friend realising that something may be wrong came to see and found the dead body of his friend lying there Thinking that he might be blamed for the murder, he also cut off his own head In the mean time the Princess was getting worried and came into the temple to look for her husband and his friend She was shocked to see both the dead bodies She was on the point of plunging the sword into her own body, when Lord Shiva disguised as a Brahmin, came and forbade her to take her own life He promised to fulfil her wishes She asked for the lives of the two men Lord Shiva said to her, ' Take the heads of both them and put them near the bodies, and cover them up with this sheet and I will revive them " The Princess did what he had asked and the men came back to life But in horror she shrank back when she saw them In her great joy and excitement, she had changed the heads and bodies The body of the Prince had the head of the minister's son and the minister s son's body had the head of the Prince

King Vikram called out to the necklace which was around the neck of the Queen— Tell me to whom does the Princess belong ? The necklace answered— 'She belongs to the body of the Prince and the head of the other " The Queen flung the

necklace to the ground and said" You are wrong. The woman belongs to the head of the Prince A man is known by his head, the body is only the decoration " The King hearing this asked the Queen to remove the second curtain There were two more curtains left and it was midnight The King began his third story

"In a village in Sorath, in Junagadh, there lived a King He was very holy and used to go very often on pilgrimages He had only one daughter When she was grown, the King decided to find a husband for her Three people set out to find a suitable Prince One was the King himself, the other his brother, and the third was the *Dewan* of the King All three went in different directions and in due course brought back three young, handsome Princes On the day of the wedding, as the Princess was having her bath, a snake appeared and bit her She died immediately The court went into mourning and the three Princes promised that they would give up all worldly pleasures One of them decided to go on a long pilgrimage to pray for the soul of the dead Princess, the other one said he would take her bones and drop them into the river Ganges, while the third one vowed he would collect all the ashes and build himself a little hut where She had been burned, and spend the rest of his life there All three promised and carried out their vows very truthfully The pilgrim learnt how to bring back the dead to life But he could only do this once—on one person So he returned and went to the burial ground and from the Prince who was living there collected the ashes and sprinkled water on it, and suddenly the Princess returned to life Then all three began fighting over the Princess

King Vikram appealed to the anklets of the Queen—"Tell me truly to which Prince does the Princess rightfully belong ?" The anklets replied,

"The Princess belongs to the one who brought her back to life " The Queen pulled the anklets off her feet and threw them into the lake and said angrily, "Your answer is wrong The one who gave life to the Princess was the father, the one who went on a pilgrimage was the brother, but the onewho collected ashes was the rightful husband,' The King was very pleased and the third curtain was lifted

The King spoke to the bangles on the Queer s arms and said—"I will now tell you my last story Be sure to answer correctly "

"In a village there lived two men One was blind, and the other was lame, They were good friends, and decided to leave the village and go on a pilgrimage So the lame one sat on the shoulders of his blind friend and they began the journey The blind man walked and the lame man guided him They arrived in a big city That day there was a perfor- the market square

The King had a daughter who had a scar on her face No one was willing to marry her So her collected all his subjects and told them—"This elephant is carrying a jug of water on its trunk, and whichever person on whom it pours the water will have to marry my daughter " The elephant went round and ronnd and eventually dropped the water on the lame and the blind men The king kept his word and got them married to his daughter He gave them a house to live in and plenty of food mance in and wealth

Years passed by, and the lame man thought that it was time to get rid of the blind man So both the Princess *and he agreed to this wicked plan They* got a poisonous snake and cutting it into small pieces cooked it in a covered pot The blind man, not kno wing his way about the house properly, knocked over the pot and the hot poisonous steam came rushing

out He found that he had suddenly regained his sight Seeing the snake in the pot, he realised that his friend and the Princess had planned on killing him Both of them began fighting over the Princess'

"Answer me now, you bangles, to whom did the Princess belong?" asked King Vikram "The Princess belonged to the blind man," the bangles replied. The Queen removed the bangles and said—"The Princess belongs to the lame man, because it was he who had made the four rounds of the sacred fire during the wedding sitting on the back of the man, who only served as a horse"

The Queen lifted the fourth curtain and she bowed before him There was much festivity and rejoicing in the kingdom

12

THE MUSTARD SEED

A mustard seed is tiny, but in flavour it is hot and sharp. This is the story of a young Rajput Prince who, though tiny, was like the mustard seed strong and hot tempered. His name was Vanaji. His father died when he was a baby, so his uncles used to look after him. He was taught all the habits and the mode of life of a good Rajput. He learnt to use the sword, the bow and the arrow, and to ride a horse. As a child he had all the qualities of a brave Rajput warrior. When his uncles used to ride, Vanaji also used to ride with them. Once a highly spirited horse got loose and no one but Vanaji could catch the horse and tame it. Vanaji offered to train it. Soon the horse became the willing slave of the young Prince and would not allow anyone else to sit on it.

One day a merchant came from Kandla with swords to sell to the palace. Vanaji thought that this was a wonderful opportunity for him to be given a new sword, as his was getting too small for him. So he sat near the merchant and examined all the swords, picking up each one, seeing how heavy it was and examining the blade very carefully. But none caught his fancy. The merchant realising he was dealing with someone who knew about swords, took out one and offered it to the Prince saying—'This is the best I have.' Vanaji picked it up, and his eyes shone—'Yes, this is it. This is exactly what I want. With this sword I would be invincible against any enemy.' So he went to his uncles and showed them the sword and asked them

to buy it for him One of the uncles said—"As long as we are alive why do you need a sword? Besides the sword is too big for you" "But I am growing' said Vanaji, "and my sword is too small" The uncle smiled and patted Vanaji and said, "It is not the length of the sword which counts but the courage and valour with which you use it With your sword, you will have to go one step forward while fighting with the enemy' Vanaji was disappointed but returned the sword to the merchant

One day Vanaji's uncles had to leave the place and go into the villages While they were away, a *Kathi* with a band of men drove away all the cattle from the village It was customary for the drums to beat when any kind of disaster took place in the village So when Vanaji heard the beating of the drums he asked his servants in the palace what the matter was He was told about the cattle being driven away by the Kathi thieves

So Vanaji thought to himself "I am alive and living in the palace How then can I allow my villagers to suffer My uncles will surely be humiliated and my mother will be ashamed of me I must go and rescue the herd' Saying this he got on his horse and brandishing his sword rode after the *Kathis* He chased the robbers deep into the forest and soon caught up with their chief The Kathi robber chief smiled at Vanaji and said—"You are a child, and have not grown a moustache yet Do you really believe you can take the cattle away from me and my men?' But Vanaji was not going to waste any words with anyone He brought his horse close to that of the robber and with a swift, hard blow, hit him The chief bent his head to avoid the blow, but the sword had cut off his nose and lips He was very angry, and told his men—"Forget the cattle and kill the boy" In the mean time the cattle had turned towards home and nothing could stop

them running back towards the village Vanaji realising he had no chance to kill the *Kathis*, turned his horse and rode swiftly away They chased him but the horse was too swift, and got away before any of them could do anything

The weeping villagers who had all assembled in the palace grounds, suddenly saw clouds of dust, and then their cattle returning They were overjoyed Vanaji followed soon His horse was foaming in the mouth Both the uncles embraced him and said "Why do you risk your life at this early age ? There will be plenty of opportunity later on Grow up first ' "I may be small,' Varaji said, "but I am strong like the mustard seed " The villagers laughed There was much rejoicing in the village for many days

13

THE SACRIFICE

SIALBET was a port in Saurashtra, in the Arabian Sea In this port lived an old ship s captain, by name Vaishram Tindel Having lived there for many generations, he knew many stories, leg nds and songs He used to say that Sialbet was built on the ruins of another very old city He used to point out the water ways, the ruins of a crumbling fort, and the many wells in the city The story of Chaliya the little six y ar old boy was also told by him It is difficult to believe whether this was true, or perhape it had become a legend, but many knew of this strange incident

In Sialbet at the time there lived a *Baniya* family The *Baniya s* name was Sagalshah Sheth, and his wife was called Chanjavati Sethani They had one son who was about six years old These two were very religious people and were well thought of in the village One day a holy man Aghori Baba, came to their house The husband greeted the holy man with great respect and asked him to enter The holy man said that he was hungry So the *Baniya* asked him what he would like to eat "I do not need any food, but I would like to eat the flesh of your one and only son," the holy man said The *Baniya* considered himself fortunate that Aghori Baba wanted his son s flesh in preference to food, and called his wife and told her They were both a little sad, but thought that God s will must be fulfilled Aghori Baba said— 'You must kill the boy yourself without tears In fact you must sing a joyous song to God.

Then cook the meat and give it to me " Sagal Sheth and his wife agreed and sent for their son who was in school



The little boy could not understand why he was being sent for so soon When he returned the parents told him that the Sadhu wanted to eat his flesh The boy smiled and agreed They bathed him and anointed him and put a *tikka* on his head They killed him by putting him into a huge mortar All this time the Jogi looked for signs of tears but could see none The boy s flesh was cooked, and still smiling the mother offered the food to the Sadhu

The Sadhu looked at them with great pride and joy, and said—"Such faith is rewarded " He blessed them both and suddenly their son returned to them—whole and smiling

14

THE STORY OF THE LOTUS

ONCE upon a time there lived a king called Vikram One day with a few soldiers he went into the forest to hunt deer Suddenly he saw a wild boar and went chasing it The forest was thick and the animal disappeared into the bushes The soldiers could not find the king and they returned to the city The King found that he was lost Riding slowly through the forest he came to a lake and sat down to rest

On the foot of one of the steps leading down to the lake the King saw a young man sitting there He was very thin and looked very sad The King approached him and asked—"Brother why do you look so unhappy ? Is there anything I can do for you ?" The man replied angrily—"Why should I burden you with my troubles ? You will laugh at me Do you think you are good King Vikram, who helps every one ?" "I am King Vikram, and I will help you if you tell me what is troubling you ' said the King The man bowed to the King and said—"Then I will tell you, good King "

"My name is Ajit Deh, son of King Jaswant Deh of Patan As a child I was inclined towards prayer, and the sacred books The luxurious life of the palace did not charm me at all and one day without telling anyone I left, and decided to go on a pilgrimage of all the holy places On my way I came here and feeling tired and thirsty, stopped near that lake under a banyan tree In the lake I saw a lotus, its stalk under the water This flower stood out amidst

all the others for its sheer beauty I have never in all my life seen anything so exquisite and perfect I can hardly describe it to you It had a thousand petals all different in colour On seeing this, I stretched out my hand to pluck the lotus, but the further I stretched my hand, ahead it went into the lake But I was determined to get it At night, I slept on the tree and during the day sat and watched the lotus Every eight days the flower would appear on the surface of the lake, and each time I tried to get it I would be unsuccessful

King Vikram decided to remain and watch the lotus and try to get it for the young sick Prince On the eighth day the lotus appeared and the King was also struck by its perfection and beauty He prayed to the gods to protect him and jumped into the lake He soon realised that he had come to another world, his feet touched the ground and he found himself in the middle of a beautiful city There was a palace and the King went in He came to a garden where flowers bloomed and the trees were full of fruit There was a lake also and on the surface dancing in the sunlight were thousands of lotus flowers, the kind King had seen, and tried to get for the Prince Someone in the palace saw him and shouted for help thinking the King was a thief Gradually a small army assembled and tried to fight the King He fought bravely and defeated them all Suddenly a Goddess appeared and asked him who he was, and what he was doing in the palace, and what power it was that he possessed so that he could come through a lake and then fight a whole army and win 'I am King Vikram, and I try to help those who seek my help Sitting on the steps of the lake is a prince, who is sad because of the lotus which he could not get Please give me a lotus, as I have promised him one "

To Goddess told King Vikram— 'The palace is yours, whenever you wish to come Saying this

she gave him a thousand lotus blossoms, and the King came back to the Prince who was overjoyed The King told him the story of the underworld palace This made the young Prince very jealous and he said to the King—"Because I told you of the lotus, you were able to go down and gain wealth and also a palace" King Vikram told him very kindly—"I require nothing, I got a lotus for you because you wanted one so much—if you can enter the underworld palace like I did, it will be yours too Nothing is impossible to the brave" Saying this the King got on to his horse and rode away

15

NAGAMDEVI

AS night descends softly over the little hamlet of Sarward & the jasmine blossoms fill the air with their perfume a visitor to the temple of Shiva might suddenly be aware of strange haunting cries—a moaning and a groaning amidst the trees He might think that it is the sobbing of the night wind rustling through the silent trees which bend and sway but suddenly he is aware of two shadows who appear and sit quietly by the lake smiling and nodding to each other If the visitor is brave enough and decides to remain he will be able to watch these two lovers on every full moon when they come to the deserted temple of Shiva and sit by the lake Dawn breaks swiftly over the lake, spilling colour everywhere The visitor is awake and once more there is the long sad cry—'O Nag my beloved Nag' which disappears as the sun rises and from every crevice of the little village people appear

Nagamdevi was the daughter of a chieftain of the Bharwad tribe They were nomads and roamed the towns and villages with their sheep Nagamdevi was born amidst the high mountains and clear rivulets under an open sky She seemed to have imbibed some of the glory of nature which was reflected in her laughter She used to sing all day At dawn she would wake the camp with her songs, while at night Nagamdevi would entertain her people as they sat around the log fire She enthralled everyone with her golden voice She was much loved by all Young men vied with each other to win her, but she was not at all interested She and her friends would

be in the market place every morning selling ghee to the shop keepers who were only interested in getting a smile from Nagamdevi

One morning as she was in the shop measuring out the ghee there was a sudden excitement There was the thud of horse's hoofs and in a cloud of dust a horseman appeared He was the famous Rajput warrior—Nagdeo returning home Nagamdevi forgot about the ghee and could only gaze upon Nagdeo as if trying to engrave his image in her heart He was the hero for whom she had waited all these years Stories of his courage and bravery had reached her ears and her one desire had been to see him But she never believed that this opportunity would ever come Slowly the uproar died The horseman rode away and Nagamdevi in her excitement had spilt all the ghee The shopkeepers all laughed at her Nagamdevi in confusion blushed, hid her face and ran back to the camp

Late that evening she went to the temple of Shiva Sitting on the steps of the lake she began to sing a love song Nagdeo who had come to the temple to worship heard her and came to her and they found themselves drawn to each other From that day onwards the lake became their meeting place —she would come to fetch water and he to pray at the temple

But he path of love is rough Nagdeo was a Rajput, whilst Nagamdevi the daughter of a nomad Their castes were different and they would never be allowed to marry each other Soon the people of the village began to gossip Everyone seemed to be talking about the romance The villagers did not like it One day Nagamdevi did not come to meet Negdeo at the appointed time He wondered what could have happened to her He looked around searching for her when a buffalo appeared from

amidst the bushes It was mooing and limping Nagdeo went forward to touch it and found a letter tied to its horn Eagerly he read it only to discover that Nagamdevi was being given in marriage to one of her own caste but she had asked him to wait for her on the night of the full moon and she would run away and they could then take their vows in the temple of Shiva

The days passed and the *full moon was shining* on the lake like an orb of golden light The temple was a shadow against the clear sky Quickly Nagamdevi approached the lake calling out to Nagdeo but there was no reply As she came closer she saw a figure curled up as if asleep She ran to him and touched him only to find her hands covered with blood In horror she shrank back and looked around to see whether anyone was near, but only the owls hooted, *and there was no other sound She sat down* and wept Perhaps he had grown weary of waiting and in despair killed himself She knelt by him crying aloud What would become of her now without Nagdeo ?

Another dawn broke The bells were ringing in the temple of Shiva The first stream of worshippers came to the temple carrying flowers, but were *horrified to find two dead bodies lying on the steps* of the lake Coming closer they saw that they were Nagamdevi and Nagdeo, her Rajput lover The trees reflected in the lake seemed to cry out in despair the worshippers gathered around and shrank back while the wind moaned and moaned in pathetic tones

16

RANI HOTHAL OF CUTCH

FROM the window of the palace the Queen was looking down She could hear the sound of music the beat of the drums and the familiar drone of the *Shehnai* She asked her maid in waiting "Why all this music and festivity? Who is coming?" The girl replied, "Odho Jham is returning to the kingdom after many months" The streets were festooned with garlands and young girls waited at the palace gate to put *Kumkum* on his forehead Soon he came, richly attired, carrying the royal banner, followed by his horsemen "Vah Odho Vah Odho" the people cried out welcoming home the returning hero

The next morning Odho and the rest of the courtiers were sitting in court The Rajputs were dressed in rich garments and listened to the adventures of Odho and from a silver bowl drank *Kasumba* But the pleasures of the palace were short lived for Odho Jham Very soon through the intrigues of his sister in law, he was banished from the court and sent into exile

With two hundred followers he set out to Dholka where he stayed with his cousin Visaldeo He was told by his cousin that he had made a promise to drive out a hundred and forty camels from the village of Kanra There would be no peace until then Odho offered his cousin his horsemen and they set out The sun was hot and on the way they stopped near a tank to rest From a distance they saw a horseman approaching He was carrying a spear and a green

with Odho Jham they came back to the rest of the horsemen and the camels

In the mean time the horsemen had sorted out all the best camels for themselves and given the others to Ekalmull As the two of them came close, the horsemen shouted out ' Here is your portion of the camels" pointing out to the half they had sorted out "Look at the camels your men have given me Odho," Ekalmull said smiling Odho was very angry and told his men, "You should not call yourself Rajputs To day you have humiliated me, yourselves and the mothers who bore you ' Saying this Odho sat on his horse and went in between the camels dividing them equally and offering Ekalmull his share "I have no need for camels I give you my share also I must now go, ' said Ekalmull Saying this he bade farewell to Odho and rode away For a long time Odho could see the shining spear and the tail of the horse swishing to and fro Then he went out of sight

Odho's heart was heavy In disgust with his men he dismissed them saying—"Go back to the kingdom and tell them I have joined the forces of the King of Bambania " Saying this he turned his horse and rode away slowly He did not know where to go He stroked his horse s neck softly and said to him—"I have nowhere to go Take me where you will " The horse neighed loudly as if he had understood what his master had said After riding some distance they came near a mountain where there was a lake The horse stopped and Odho looked for a shady tree under which he could rest Suddenly he saw Ekalmull s horse tied near a tree and also his clothes hanging on to the branch of the tree He was surprised and thought that perhaps he was bathing in the lake

He went to the wall of the lake and looked over, There was a woman there She saw him and called-out saying "Ekalmull is not here It is me, Hothal Please go and wait for me I will dress and come" Odho could not understand what she was saying and who she was and how she knew he was looking for Ekalmull She came out dressed, and stood before him in all her beauty The drops of water on her face and arms looked like pearls! "I am Ekalmull—but my real name is Hothal I am a Goddess" Odho wanted to marry her, but she said that she would never be able to leave these mountains No one should know that she was married, as she did not belong to this earth

That evening as the sun was setting Odho Jham and Hothal the warrior Queen got married The mountain was their kingdom and the birds and beasts of the forest were their only subjects For many years Hothal and Odho lived in the cave in the mountain They had two sons, who later became brave warriors in the court of the king

17

THE GODDESS OF FATE

THERE once lived a wise and kindly king He ruled in Patna Often he would disguise himself and roam around the village, listening to the problems of his many subjects One night he arrived in one of the villages and spent the night at the home of a Brahmin and his wife The wife had a new baby which was a week old

After their evening meal the Brahmin and the King fell asleep The King kept his sword by his bedside At midnight Vidhata—the Goddess of Fate entered She was carrying a pot full of *kumkum* and a pen with a jewelled handle of pearls She went to the little cot where the baby lay asleep She lighted a small oil lamp, and then took the pen and dipping it in *kūmkum* began to draw the lines of the child s fate on its palm She drew many lines, slowly and distinctly, but when she began to draw the line of life—the pen fell from her hand and broke

She stood up and in great sorrow dimmed the light and walked out In the verandah she accidently bumped against the sleeping King who awoke and caught her saying—"Are you a ghost or a real person ' Let me go King I am Vidhata the Goddess of Fate I came to write the fate of the Brahmin s son, but my pen broke, so now I must go ' she said "What did you write tell me or I will not let you go ' Very sadly she said—"He will die when he is eighteen—on the day of his wedding

When he is going around the sacred fire with his bride, on the fourth round, a lion will come and kill him"



The Goddess walked away The King called out to her and said—"To day you have written a very sad fate for the son of a Brahmin I have taken shelter in his house, so unless I can prove you false, I will never rest in peace The next morning the King bade farewell to the Brahmin and said to him—"Do not forget to invite me to your son s wedding I will come with gifts for him'

Many years passed and on the day of the wedding of the Brahmin's son, the King arrived in great splendour His procession consisted of a large army of elephants and horses, all beautifully decorated The beat of the drums and the sound of bugles announced the arrival of the King The village was silent Everyone wondered how a King could challenge the Goddess of Fate They waited eagerly to see what would happen

The King gave orders to his army to surround the entire village No one was allowed near the marriage ceremony The King stood near the sacred fire with a naked sword, ready to kill, if required.

The bridegroom went round the fire, for the first, then the second, then the third time On the fourth time, a roar was heard and a huge lion rushed out and caught him in the throat, and killed him instantly There was nothing anyone could do Everyone was puzzled, as to where the lion could have come from Then someone pointed to one of the clay pitchers which stood at the entrance of the room There was a figure of a lion on it The lion had come from there and then returned once more to become an engraving on the pot

The King called out to the Brahmin and his wife and asked them to keep the dead body of their son for six months They should preserve it with oils and herbs, and within the time given he would return and give life to the body "If I cannot give you back your son alive, I will not rule in Patan any more," the King said

The months passed King Jaswant Deh in his travels helped many including a "Nag" snake from the burning flames in a forest fire He came to rest near a well and from the depths of the well the wife of the snake appeared and thanked the King for rescuing her husband She asked him whether she could help him in any way The King very sadly told her the story of the Brahmin s son To day is the last day of the six months and I still have not been able to find the immortal nectar, to bring him back to life ' The wife of the snake dived deep down into the well and came up with a pot of nectar in her hand and offered it to the King The King thanked her profusely and rode away in all haste

As he came towards the house of the Brahmin, everyone was waiting outside near the gate The tiny oil lamps were flickering in the wind and the air was heavy with the smoke of incense The King entered and sprinkled the nectar on the body of the dead son Suddenly, as though awaking from sleep, the boy opened his eyes, and then got up

The voice of the Goddess of Fate could be heard —"You have defeated me, O brave King Fate will now bow to your courage !"

18

THE KING AND THE GYPSY

KING Akbar was holding court in Delhi It was announced that a gypsy chief wanted to meet him Akbar asked his minister ' Has he brought the sand from Goga ?' ' No, Sire, he has returned empty handed He said that he had been to Cutch, loaded his donkeys and was returning with great joy when he was held back by the King there and the donkeys were taken away from him said the minister ' Send for the gypsy Akbar ordered The gypsy chief stood before the King trembling with fear There were tears in his eyes Do not be afraid If you tell me the truth you will be forgiven but if you tell a lie you will be put to death Akbar said 'You are the King We will not lie to a King the gypsy said and continued — Having loaded the sand at Goga we were on our way back We came to the town of Lalmiyana Mardva on the banks of the river Vatrak near Sabikantha The King there stopped us and would not allow us to proceed further The soldiers unloaded the sand, and took away our donkeys and sent us away We have arrived without anything "You should have told him that the sand was for your King, ' Akbar said "We did tell him but King Lalmiya twisted his moustache and challenged you saying "Ask your King to attack us and take back the sand, if he so wishes I will be here to receive him '

Akbar was very annoyed and thought to himself, "Can a fox take away food from a lion ? It is

impossible !" He sent for one of his officers and told him— Azam Khan, go to Mandva, and crush the King there and bring back my sand Bring King Lalmiya also, dead or alive If you fail do not return to Delhi "

For a period of three years Azam Khan continued to chase King Lalmiya and his force through the dense forests of Mahikantha, but was unable either to defeat or capture him The army of Lalmiya used to hide in the forest and caves, and from behind large rocks attacked the army of Akbar with spears The army was tired and defeated and Azam Khan returned to Delhi with a few men who had survived the three years of war

Akbar sent for him ' How is it that you have returned without the enemy You were supposed to return like a lion but you have come like a defeated fox, ' Akbar said angrily Azam Khan said to him—"What could I do' Even a lion is helpless if he is surrounded by the enemy from all sides I have brought back a few men who were left I was not idle there I have made a note of the mountains and caves in which the army used to hide and also a map of the village He showed Akbar the map and the difficulty he had in fighting the army of Lalmiya We need a very large army to be able to surround the forests and guard the maze of roads leading to the rivers, Azam Khan said

With the help of a large force Azam Khan invaded Mandva again Lalmiya knew that Akbar would send another army against him, and he also re organised his own army He recruited men from the Bhil and Kohli tribes and also got help from the neighbouring kings of Revakantha and Mahikantha and asked for men who were experts in sword and spear fighting and archery When Azam Khan in-

vaded Mandva he was well prepared to meet him. All the old maps were now quite useless, as Lalmiya had changed all his plans

The battle went on for many years Azam Khan tried many times to make surprise attacks but the enemy was always on the alert, and he was unsuccessful Lalmiya decided to wage an open battle, and was prepared to be defeated or to defeat the enemy As many years of war had made him tired, he thought this was the only way A fierce battle was fought Hundreds of horses and elephants were killed, and both sides lost many men The soil and rivers were stained with the blood of a terrible war But Lalmiya defeated the army of Akbar, and Azam Khan was killed

The news of the defeat reached Akbar He was wondering at the power of the enemy king, his prowess in battle, and his great courage, and thought to himself, that if he ever invaded Delhi, it would be a difficult task to fight against him Besides being a courageous fighter, he must also be very clever and wise He was deep in his thoughts when Rajasur, one of his officers came in carrying a silver tray which was covered with a silk cloth "Have you also brought maps to show me? The battle is over and we are defeated,' Akbar said smiling "No, Sire, I do not bring maps, but the head of King Lalmiya," the officer replied Akbar was surprised Rajasur took off the cloth and the uncovered head lay there "You had announced that you wanted the head of the King dead or alive," Rajasur said "How did you get to kill him, ' Akbar asked very curiously ' It was impossible to conquer him on the battle field, sire He was a brave and clever King, much loved by his army, and so I planned on trying to trap him I offered him our terms of

truce, saying that we wanted peace During our talks he began to trust me, and when the opportunity arose I killed him," said Rajasur

Akbar was overjoyed He sent for a fakir and told him "Take the head of this king into the market places of Delhi Show everyone that we have won the battle, and get one rupee from all the shop keepers" The fakir did as he was told, and took the head to Chandni Chowk in Delhi and got the money

Then some people of the palace approached the king very humbly and said "It is unworthy of a great king like you to display the head of King Lalmiya *in the alleys of Delhi* He may have been your enemy, but he was a great king and fought with courage and valour He was not defeated on the battle field He was a wise king, a man amongst many Do not dishonour his memory thus You may give us the head if you have no use for it" Akbar was deeply touched by these words, and told them, "I cannot return the head to you, but I will cremate it with honour and will build a shrine there And when the next fort is being built I will give orders to the workmen to name one of the main gates *Lal Darwaja*

All this in memory of a brave enemy

19

A CHARAN AND HIS WIFE

IT was July Low dark clouds hung in the sky It was going to rain Peacocks screeched in the fields, prophesying rain The *Charan* called out to his wife, who was sitting in the courtyard of the little hut and oiling the hoofs of a buffalo— "The rain is coming We should now return to our own village I can almost smell the moist earth' The wife smiled quietly and said— 'The heart of a farmer melts when he sees the dark rain clouds

The *Charan* and his wife got ready to begin their journey She called out to the buffalo who was lying in the pond—' Mangal, Mangal come out of the water, we have to go The buffalo came out unwillingly, swishing its tail They loaded their belongings on the buffalo and began their journey On the way it drizzled, and rained When the sun shone they would wait awhile and dry their clothes and start again The breeze would blow the woman s hair and strands would fall across her lovely face The three of them walked along contentedly through forests, where the *Jamun* trees were heavily laden with fruit The rivers looked purple with the fallen fruit Monkeys jumped from tree to tree Birds twittered and sang in the leafy branches, and peacocks called out in shrill tones

Soon they came to a river The sun was setting like a big orange ball Women with brass water pots on their heads had come to collect water from the river Children played On the banks of the river was a village The *Charan* thought this would be a

good place to settle down in He went up to one of the villagers and asked him—"Who is the King of this village ?" ' Bapu Porsoval," came the reply "Is he a good King ?", asked the *Charan*, "Will he allow me to stay here ?" ' Who will refuse land to a farmer ?", the villager said smiling at the *Charan* The *Charan* told his wife that he would go and see the King and ask him for some land to cultivate, so they could live in the village "If he should refuse we will go to your father s village Do not leave this place, for the place is strange, and we do not know anyone If you should get lost whom will I ask about you ?" The woman promised faithfully that she would remain on the banks of the river As he went, he looked back and warned her to remain where she was She nodded

The *Charan* arrived to see the King The King was in council with many of the villagers They were drinking *Kasumba* The *Charan* requested the king to allot him a piece of land where he could farm and keep his two buffaloes and build a little hut for his wife and himself "Welcome, welcome, where do you come from ?", the King asked him "We come from Gujarat, we have no home of our own, and so we would be very grateful for a few acres of land "The King offered him *Kasumba* and asked him to sit down among the people and talk The *Kasumba* intoxicated the *Charan*, but he did not leave He smoked hookah and began singing, and reciting couplets He rain, sang of the clouds the song of the birds and alsothe love story of Radha and Krishna He recited verses about the different months of the year, and the rivers which he had seen So engrossed was he that he did not hear the shouting in the village 'The river has overflowed A woman and her buffaloes have been carried away Help help get away from the river Shouts and screams, reached the King and the people The

Charan ran towards the river and some one pointed out to him the red *sari* of his wife He tried to jump into the roaring river but the men held him back A woman came up to him and told him, "I asked your wife to move away from the river bank as I had seen the water rushing in from the mountain, but she smiled and said that you had asked her not to leave the spot in which she was standing, so she must remain till you come Everyone else went away, but your wife stood there with her big, black eyes full of light and brightness, until the water came and swept her away'

The King came to see what had happened The *Charan* was almost mad with sorrow and told the King—"Your village looked so good to us, but now your river has swallowed my wife She was my only jewel, whom I treasured above all else"

For many days after the death of his wife the *Charan* remained like a mad man He used to roam in the streets and villages singing his songs In the palace the Queen used to listen to him and at nights, she was unable to rest because of his sad laments She asked the King to do something to help the man The King did not know what he could do, and asked his wife to suggest a cure She sent someone to the next village to call the father of the dead woman and when he came asked him whether he had another daughter The man said he had He was asked to bring her, and everyone who had seen the drowning girl agreed that her sister looked exactly like her The Queen told the father of the girl to give her in marriage to the *Charan*

Once again it was the month of July Rain clouds hung in the sky The river flowed calmly through the little village Women filled their pots in the river children played buffaloes lay in the

water, and peacocks roamed The men were in council with the King Among them was the *Charan* They were drinking *Kasumba* and the Charan was singing Suddenly he heard the shouts from the village He rubbed his eyes and rushed towards the river where he remembered his wife was standing He went there and saw the people running for safety At one end of the river bank, exactly where he had left her was his wife in a red *sari* He rushed up to her and took her out and asked—"Why do you remain there when the water is rushing towards you ?" "You had asked me not to move," she said "I thought you were drowned," he said "You have probably had too much *Kasumba*," she said They walked away together, leading the buffaloes away from the river

The King gave them some acres of land to build hut, and they settled down happily Sometimes at night the *Charan* would awake and look at his wife and tell her "Were you really standing in the river when the floods came ? I dreamt that you had been washed away" His wife would smile but say nothing

20

RANAK DEVDI

HADMAT was a potter Every day he would go into the forest to dig, and bring back clay to make his pots One day as he lifted the basket of clay on to his head, he thought he heard the whimpering sounds of a child crying He must be mistaken, he thought. What would a child be doing here in the middle of a thick, lonely forest, he thought to himself But the sound came again This time he went to look Not very far from where he had been digging under the shade of a banyan tree he saw a basket, and going closer he saw a baby lying there, wrapped in a silken sheet The child was hungry, and was crying He picked up the child and brought it home His wife was overjoyed as she did not have a child of her own She believed it was the will of God, and said with great joy— ' Now I will be called a woman with a child The child was very beautiful and both the potter and his wife realised that this child must be of royal blood Soon they found out that the baby girl was from the palace of Raja Sher Parmar of Cutch But there was a curse on the child The astrologer had predicted that the Prince or King to whom she would be married would be killed and would lose his kingdom So she was cast out from the palace

In the village of Majevdi, where the potter and his wife lived, the little girl grew up She brought great joy and happiness to everyone around As the years passed she blossomed into a very beautiful woman It happened that a band of *Charans* who passed by the village, saw the girl fetching water

from the well, and were struck by her unusual beauty They returned to Patan and told the young King of Gujarat—Siddhraj—"She is like Padmini, and will decorate your palace most fittingly, Sir" Having got permission from the King to fetch her the *Charans* returned to the little village and came to the potter s house They told him that the King would reward them handsomely for the girl But the potter shook his head sadly and said—"We are happy with our clay and the wheel We do not want any extra money I am a humble potter and do not want anything to do with the royal family" Hearing this the *Charans* were angry and said—"If you do not obey, the King will crush you" The poor potter was afraid and in great sorrow agreed to part with his daughter

Preparations for the wedding began But the ways of fate are strange Just before the wedding, King Ra Khengar kidnapped her and took her away, and she became the Queen of Junagadh Siddhraj was very angry and with a huge army invaded Sorath For twelve long years he fought but was unsuccessful because of the Girnar mountains which surround Junagadh It was impossible to make headway

King Ra Khengar had two nephews, whom he was bringing up like his own sons as they had lost their father Their names were Desal and Visil One day the King punished them for some wrong they had done, and Desal thought he would take revenge He stole out of the palace and went into the enemy camp and planned a campaign against King Ra Khengar

Late one night Desal and Siddhraj at the head of a large force came to the palace gates The soldiers hid themselves in sacks and arrived in covered cart

is it at this late hour? The gates cannot be opened," replied the gatekeeper Desal shouted—"It is me Desal, I have brought some grain Please allow the carts to come in" The gate keeper recognised the voice, but to make sure he opened the little window near the gate and looked out No sooner did he put his head out, it was cut off with one swift movement of Desal s sword Desal then entered through the window and opened the gates and the carts were brought in The soldiers got out of the sacks and swords in hands rushed towards the palace, led by Desal and Siddhraj

Ra Khengar was taken by surprise and in spite of being a good fighter could do nothing against so many soldiers He died fighting His last words to Desal were ' Traitor ! what an evil deed you have done ' After the King was killed, they came to the palace of Queen Ranak and Desal announced that her husband the King had come On hearing this she opened her door Surprised she asked—"Where is the King your uncle ? 'He is dead, ' Desal replied, "This is Siddhraj the King of Gujarat He will make you the Queen of Patan ' Ranak Devdi looked at him and said—' Unworthy, low coward that you are, you should have perished in your childhood Her hand went to the coil of her hair and she pulled out a dagger Siddhraj fearing she might kill herself jump d forward and seized the dagger from her hand He entered the next room where the baby son of Ranak Devdi was sleeping and killed him The elder son came to his mother and hid behind her, sobbing in fear "You must not be afraid, my son " she said trying to calm him Siddhraj told her—"If you follow me quietly, I will spare the life of your son ' There was nothing she could do but obey him

Desal approached Siddhraj and said to him 'Now that you have what you want and I have helped you to fulfil your promise, give the kingdom

of Junagadh to my me and brother" Siddhraj stroked his beard thoughtfully and said to Desal—'Should I give the crown of Junagadh to a traitor, to one who did not hesitate to destroy his own uncle? What assurance do I have that next you will not betray me?" He ordered his men to put the two brothers to death

Taking Ranak Devdi he left for Patan At Patan he sent for all the ladies of the court to look after Ranak Devdi, but she was not interested He tried his best to amuse her with court dancers, jesters, and story tellers of his court, but nothing found favour with her ' What is that you desire ? he asked her "A fish cannot live without water, a creeper cannot grow without the support of a tree, similarly a wife cannot live without her husband The luxuries and the pomp of your court do not interest me The only desire I now have is to die So take me to Wadhwan There is a river there by the name of Bhogawo, and on its banks I will burn myself"

Siddhraj realised that she would not consent to remain in the kingdom, and so he agreed to take her where she wanted to go A pyre was made for her from sandalwood, and she got ready to burn herself As a last attempt to stop her Siddhraj said—"I will not give you any fire If you say you are so truthful, ask your God to light your pyre for you" She folded her hands and prayed to the God of the sun, and suddenly flames leaped down from the sky and touched the sandalwood and it began to burn Ranak Devdi disappeard into the flames

After her death Siddhraj built a shrine in her honour on the banks of the river Bhogawo It still remains to this day and reminds us of the great lady

21

THE STORY OF HAMIRJI AND KHENGARJI

HAMIRJI was the King of Cutch He was a brave and good King and much loved by his people He had three sons The eldest was Khengarji, and the two others, Sahibji and Ryabji As this story opens, it was the King s birthday, and there were many festivities The King sat in his council hall—a magnificent building with thirty two gilded pillars The fountains played and there was the music of the *Shehnai* and the beating of many drums The chief guest of the King on that day, was the King of Bada—Jam Raval The three young princes were playing near the dias where the two Kings sat and watched the dances and talked with the courtiers

The King of Bada invited King Hamirji to come to Bada Khengarji interrupted the conversation and asked Jam Raval "Have you such a beautiful palace, and fountains and all the splendour which we have here ? Jam Raval smiled at the boy and said, "Yes, we have all this and more Why don't you come and see for yourself ? Much against his own wishes the King agreed to pay Jam Raval a visit taking his sons along

One day they set out the King and his two elder boys, accompanied by their old and trusted servant Chhachar Butta On the outskirts of the town of Bada there lived the aunt of the princes So the boys went to see her, whilst the King waited for them The aunt welcomed them but her clever mind suspec-

ted the evil motive of Jam Raval She knew that he wanted to rule over cutch, and he was looking for every opportunity to do away with Hamirji She sent word to the King not to go But the King replied, "I am a Rajput I cannot break a promise, I had told him that I was coming and so I must go, no matter what happens But you keep the boys with you ' Leaving the boys, King Hamirji went to the palace, taking with him Chhachar Butta

Night fell The palace of the King of Bada was lit up with many lights When King Hamirji arrived Jam Raval came forward with open arms to meet him, but was annoyed that he did not bring his sons. He, however did not show his feeling, and with great pomp and show entertained his guest Chhachar Butta watched everything and tried to ask the King not to drink too much of the wine which was being forced on him But it was too late King Hamirji became unconscious and Jam Raval ordered his men to seize him and kill him Seeing all this Chhachar Butta realised that now that the King was dead the princes were in great danger, and he quickly disappeared from the palace and came to the house of the aunt of the boys There he told them what had happened, and made haste to leave Khengarji told his aunt, "Do not worry We are the sons of a brave Rajput, and when the time comes we will show our courage and valour We will be all powerful in Cutch one day and will defeat Jam Raval "

In the meantime news had reached Jam Raval that the princes were taking shelter in the house of their aunt So with a few men he went there She realised that if she delayed in opening the door, there would be greater chance of the boys being able to get away to safety So when the King came, she delayed until in anger the soldiers broke the door

On entering they searched every where but there was no sign of the princes The King was very angry and set out to search for the boys

Chhachar Butta and the two princes arrived in the village of Sapar, and went to the home of a man called Bhinya Kakkal The man asked, "Who are you ?" Chhachar told them the whole story and asked for shelter Bhinya was greatly honoured and asked his wife to cook for them But the servant said—"There is no time for food, please hide us, for Jam Raval will soon come in search of the boys " In the courtyard there was a huge heap of cotton and under the pile he hid the three of them He gave them some food and left them there

Soon Jam Raval appeared He said to Bhinya, "Have you seen two boys ? Are you giving them shelter ? Bhinya replied Search my house I do not know where they are I do not know who you are talking about " But Jam Raval was insistent He said that he had news that the boys were hidden some where in his house When Bhinya denied the fact, Jam Raval took his sword and chopped off the head of Bhinya s eldest son Once again he asked, 'Tell me, where are the boys ? I give you another chance " Again he got a refusal Bhinya said he did not know Then Jam Raval cut off the head of the other boy—and then the third son Bhinya s wife looked from the corner of the room and nodded sadly at her husband Jam Raval searched every nook and corner of the house, and then went to the heap of cotton and with his sword pierced the point of his sword into the mass of white The sword cut into the hand of Khengarji, but the boy bravely wiped off the blood from the tip of the sword and the sword came out clean In disgust Jam Raval took his men and left



Khengarji, his brother and Chhachar Butta made ready to leave Khengarji bowed his head and told Bhinya, "You have done everything for us You have lost your sons, I do not know how I can ever re pay you" "Be a hero and avenge yourself," Bhinya said The night was cold when the three of them set out The stars were shining in the sky They walked all night and in the morning as the sun came up they halted near a well for some water The woman at the well offered them food, and took them to her home, where she gave them curd and bread There was a horse tied to a tree, and Chhachar Butta asked her to lend them the horse "Ahmedabad is far' he said 'I must get these boys to safety," he told her She very willingly gave the horse and once more they set out on their journey

The way was long, and on the way they had many adventures But at last they arrived at Ahmedabad As they neared the city the lights of the palace of king Mahmood Beghda were shining from

the distance They went to the house of a man called Aliaji, and remained with him

At Ahmedabad there was a school for physical training where the boys were taught wrestling, sword fighting, archery, and to throw spear One day there was a wrestling match, and fifty boys were asked to wrestle with one another After the winner was proclaimed, the teacher who was known as Jai Chand Bhatti, a well known wrestler, called out to the crowd—' Is there anyone here who can challenge the winner of this wrestling match ? ' Khengarji got up slowly and smilingly went up and shook the hand of the winner The crowd cheered and the match began Gradually the strength and ability of Khengarji became obvious, and his opponent began to tire All of a sudden, Khengarji lifted the other boy on his shoulders and threw him on to the floor The teacher rushed forward and congratulated him, and everyone shouted and cheered Khengarji After that Khengarji joined the school and for many years learnt all the games of skill, and how to make full use of his sword, and of his bow and arrow from Jai Cand Bhatti He became famous in Ahmedabad

Jam Raval continued to plunder, kill and harass the different villages Eventually, he came to the town of Lakhiarvida—the kingdom of the dead King Hamirji whom he had killed Here many of the old followers of the king were still alive and tried to fight against Jam Raval, but they were defeated and the flag of the enemy was hoisted Having heard that there were plenty of riches in the palace, Jam Raval decided to persuade the queens to surrender But these brave Rajput women would rather kill themselves than open their gates to let Jam Raval enter They collected firewood and built a large pyre When Jam Raval s army broke open the gates, all they could see were high flames rising into the sky

and the dead bodies of the queens, who had burnt themselves to death

Khengarji was now a grown man, brave and able On a shooting expedition, he had saved the life of the King from a ferocious lion, and since then the King paid special attention to him, and looked on him with great kindness Khengarji came to know about the invasion of the army of Jam Raval and requested King Beghda for an army so that he could fight and regain all his lost territory He remembered the death of his father and of the promise he had made to avenge him The time had now come to keep it

One day, on the outskirts of the village of the Bada, drums were heard announcing the army of Khengarji The army of Jam Raval came to meet him and there was a battle in which Jam Raval s men were very badly defeated Khengarji fought alongside his men encouraging them Jam Raval and Khengarji came face to face Both had swords and both knew how to use them well Suddenly Jam Raval thrust his sword forward, but slipped and fell back It was simple for Khengarji to put an end to him with his sword, but he held back—"Get up Jam Raval I will not strike you when you are down' Again they fought, the armies stood around watching, and admiring the skill of both the Kings Once more Jam Raval hit out, and this time the sword of Khengarji was thrown into the air He was helpless But Jam Raval, laughed and said—"I am also a Rajput Pick up your sword and then come"

Jam Raval s army was completely routed The flag was lying in a crumpled heap on the ground Jam Raval threw his sword into the bushes nearby and stopped fighting Khengarji wiped his brow and told Jam Raval—"You had built the reign of Cutch on a foundation of murder and dishonesty

the distance They went to the ho
called Aliaji, and remained with him

At Ahmedabad there was a school
training where the boys were taught wi
fighting, archery, and to throw spe
there was a wrestling match, and fif
asked to wrestle with one another Af
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Jai Chand Bhatti, a well known wrestl
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the match began Gradually the streng
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for many years learnt all the games
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Jam Raval continued to plunder, ki
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decided to persuade the queens to su
these brave Rajput women would rat
selves than open their gates to let Jar
They collected firewood and built
When Jam Raval s army broke open
they could see were high flames rising

and the dead bodies of the queens, who had burnt themselves to death

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How long do you think you can remain?" "I wanted to rule Cutch I have fulfilled my wishes,' Jam Raval said "You killed my father, murdered him when he came as a guest to your kingdom Now I am alive, and you are finished Tell me what am I going to do with you?" asked Khengarji Jam Raval laughed and said "Do with me what you will I can enjoy myself even amidst my enemies!" Jam Raval was taken prisoner and eventually allowed to leave Cutch

22

VRAJKUNWAR BA

QUEEN Vrajkunwar Ba was the wife of the King of Ambla One day the King came with news that two of his cousins had escaped from the clutches of the Nawab of Cambay and had arrived in Ambla seeking shelter The Queen said, "Those who are in need of shelter cannot ever be turned away from a Rajput home" "We will be courting trouble from the Nawab if he ever comes to know," the King said "You are a Rajput How can you talk this way? We will fight him and his big army if nec ssary I will come to the battlefield and teach these villagers to fight" his wife said "What will be the result ? "I do not bother about making accounts of results, that is the job of the *Baniyas* and *Brahmins* We will trust in God," the Queen replied

Having taken permission of the Queen, the King went to bring the two boys They were in a terrible condition, having been without food for several days Dosaji the elder of the two told his story to the King and the Queen "One day the Nawab sent a message to me that he wanted to see me So I went to Cambay The Nawab demanded that I should pay double the amount of revenue on my lands I told him that it was impossible and I could not pay, as I was having difficulty in paying the usual amount The Nawab said that unless I paid I would be put into prison So I stayed in imprisonment until Vakhtoji came along with a band of his friends and by killing the guard they helped me to escape Both of us got away from Cambay to Vadgam When

the Nawab found out that I had escaped, he sent his forces to capture me There was no safe hiding place on land, so we jumped into the sea We swam as much as we could then drifted with the waves and eventually were washed on to the shore Some fishermen kept us for a few days There we found out a way to reach Ambla"

The Nawab enquired about Dosaji and Vakhtoji and found out that they had gone to Ambla and were being sheltered by the King and the Queen So the Nawab decided to go to Ambla with his army He arrived and camped outside the village and sent a message to the King asking him to return the two prisoners or fight a war The King was very disturbed, as he felt that against the army of the Nawab, their little village stood no chance whatever How would they save the two cousins who had come for shelter? He called them and said, 'We will have to fight but both of you escape before it is too late' But the boys refused to go and said that they would also fight against the Nawab They began to think of plans for the defence of Ambla "We have a natural barrier of thorny cactus right around the village This will be our fort A few fearless Rajputs will be our army and our sharp edged swords our weapons The small cannons we have, will have to be used wisely, and we will have to watch the movements of the Nawab's forces very carefully,' the Queen said to the King, Dosaji and Vakhtoji They were all amazed at the courage and wisdom of the Queen

The King sent word to the Nawab that as long as there was blood in the bodies of the Rajputs they would not surrender the prisoners—"I will meet him on the battlefield," he said On getting this message the Nawab began preparations for war He was quite sure that within a few hours the village of Ambla would be completely wiped out Soon the

cannons boomed out, and began to fall in the village The Queen ordered all the villagers to bring out their quilts and soak them in water and cover the burning cannon balls Thus the fire would not spread The village of Ambla had no fort, only a raised platform on a hill where they had kept the small cannons This was their only point of advantage, and they made full use of it There were four gates in the village, all three guarded by brave Rajputs, and the Southern gate was left open The King conferred with the Queen and his cousins had realised that the only way to win the enemy was to make them come through the Southern gate, and meet them with swords They could then also use their cannons to advantage One of the men from the village decided that he would go across to the enemy His name was Jheula Going to the Nawab he offered his services saying that he would show him how to win "The King of Ambla is very cruel, so I have come to your side for shelter I will gain victory for you" The Nawab believed him and asked men who were at the cannons to stop firing and load the camels with the ammunition and enter by the Southern gate The people of Ambla waited for this opportunity and the moment the camels entered, the small cannons began to fire and the gunpowder caught fire and exploded Jheula in the meantime disappeared The Nawab shouted "Jheula, Jheula," but he was nowhere to be seen The Nawab realised that he had been tricked but asked his men to take their swords and meet the army of the King face to face The Queen picked up a sword and moved in between the men and encouraged them not to lose heart Every man in the village fought with all his heart and many of the Nawab's army were badly wounded The Nawab took the rest of his men and fled

Ambla celebrated its victory with great festivity The town was lit with hundreds of oil lamps and looked like another Divali Everyone praised the courage of the Queen who made victory possible

23

THE WOMAN AND THE BOAR

THE day was clear and warm A farmer was on his way to his farm He was carrying his long stick on his shoulders his two arms hanging over it, and singing to himself A woman passed by, young, like the coming of spring her face full of sunshine He called out to her, Be careful There is a wild boar somewhere along the road I managed to escape, but keep a sharp watch ' The farmer went on his way, she on hers She thought to herself, "If the boar comes, let it I cannot go back now I must reach this food to the field ' She was a Rajput woman, her name was Umade her husband, a farmer was Sujan Singh They had been married recently, and were very happy together In the village they were both much loved, as they were polite, hospitable and kind Old and young welcomed them Sujan Singh used to go early in the morning to the *fields and his wife would cook a simple meal* and take it to him at mid day She used to look forward to these daily trips She loved the fields, the sun, and the wind beating against her She used to enjoy sitting near Sujan Singh whilst he ate

That morning she followed her usual routine She suddenly remembered the warning of the shepherd, but she had to go on Suddenly her thoughts were disturbed From one of the bushes she heard, the noise and grunting of a boar The animal suddenly came out of the bushes and looked at her She held on the food and ran, but the boar ran after her She wondered whether it was after her or the food, but there was no time to think In front of her

was a tree She ran around it and put the food down in a corner She kept running around the tree hoping to puzzle the boar, but he was too clever for he chased after her Then suddenly, she caught him from the back and clung on The boar could not escape She looked into the fields beyond and saw a man there She shouted out to him for help He came running and saw what had happened He caught the boar and Umade released herself and made ready to go She thanked the farmer She had only gone a few steps, when the farmer said, "This pig has eaten too much corn and sweet sugar cane from the fields I will not be able to hold on much longer What shall I do ? If I let him loose he will surely kill me" "You are a man and you are afraid of the boar Wait a little I will go to the field and bring my sword and kill it You will have to hold on for a little longer" Saying this she ran swiftly through the fields Her husband saw her coming and to him she looked like a deer who had escaped from captivity Quickly she ran to the field, loosened the sword from the plough and ran back without saying a word to her husband

In those days, the Rajputs always kept their swords with them and whilst they were working in the fields, they used to tie it to their ploughs for fear of dacoits, who used to loot and plunder Sujan Singh wondered what had happened, and left his ploughing and followed her When Umade arrived the farmer was struggling to hold on to the boar She asked him to pick it up and throw it far away The farmer using all his strength did as he was told, but the boar was big and heavy and dropped quite close to where they were standing The moment it got free it ran after the farmer Umade picked up her sword and with one swift stroke killed it "Bravo ! Bravo ! Rajput women' She wondered who could address her thus and turning around saw her husband standing there with a lot of other people

"Why did you come without eating your food ?" She asked him shyly The farmer told everyone how Umade had caught the wild animal Everyone was proud of her, and said—"You are the pride of our village, brave in danger, yet a tender wife"

24

THE GIFT OF LORD SHIVA

KHANAJI Thakur used to own the village of Sathli near Mehsana in Gujarat He was a great devotee of Lord Shiva, and not one single day would pass without his going to the temple of Shiva and spending a couple of hours in prayer This used to annoy the Thakur s wife and one day she said to him "For twelve years you have been praying and worshipping the Lord Shiva, yet he has not bestowed any special favour on you Why do you take so much trouble over your prayers every day ? You are the King in this village, yet you gather flowers make wick for the oil lamp, fetch water for the *Puja* This is for a *Brahmin* to do, and not for a King

The King replied, "I do not worship for the sake of gaining favours It makes me happy to prepare for the *Puja* myself Tell me, if I eat on your behalf will your hunger be satisfied ?" The Queen laughed and said, "No, naturally not, I will remain hungry ' The King then said, "It is the same with *Puja* If someone else makes all my preparations for me, and I pay him, how then do I gain ? '

One night Khanaji Thakur dreamt that Lord Shiva had come to him His body was covered with ash, and in one hand he was holding his *trishul* His hair was coiled on his head Lord Shiva looked at the Thakur and said to him, "I am pleased with your selfless service to me On the third day I will come to you, and you may ask for whatever you

wish" The King awoke with a start, and looked around the room, and found that he had been dreaming

On the third day, the King went to the temple very early He felt quite light hearted The temple was on a lonely hill top Walking slowly, enjoying the beginning of the new day, the Thakur went on his way At the temple, he arranged the flowers and incense, and sat down to meditate For a long while he remained thus When he finished he expected to see Lord Shiva standing before him as he had seen him in his dream, but there was no one Disappointed he got up and prepared to go home When he came out of the temple he saw a *Faqir* sitting under the shade of a tree and counting his beads The *Faqir* called out to him Khanaji Thakur went to him and the *Faqir* said—"He who came to you in your dream has sent me Take this spear, these ashes and this iron ring Defend them at the cost of your life As long as you have these with you, no harm can come to you The Lord Shiva has blest you These are his gifts to you" The King replied, "I have the utmost faith in my God, and if I get guidance from you, my life will be ful filled" The *Faqir* asked him, 'Haven t you heard the famous proverb "A prophet is not known in his own country" ? If you remain in Santhli, you will not have the opportunity to show your brave spirit. Go to Ahmedabad with these gifts and you will prosper One thing more—every year to day, you must give alms to the blind, the deaf and the dumb This should be continued even after your death" After this, the *Faqir* disappered

The Thakur and his wife moved to Ahmedabad At that time the ruling monarch was Mahmood Beghda Ahmedabad was a flourishing city After having been there for sometime, one morning the Thakur heard the King s horsemen announcing

something to the beat of drums He went out to the street and listened to what they were saying "Anyone who can capture the Black Bhil, dead or alive will be well rewarded" This Bhil was a terrorist, and he was very dark—so he was known by everyone as the Black Bhil The Thakur thought to himself, "Now perhaps I can show the King what I can do" He went to the Palace The King was impressed by Khanaji Thakur's appearance He was tall and fair, and carried himself well The Thakur bowed to the King and said—'I have come to offer my services to you" "I do not require any body's services Many Rajputs have come to me, praising themselves, but none could capture this Bhil," the King said Khanaji said If I can prove myself, and bring his head' 'Then you will not only gain reputation and wealth, but I will honour your wishes," the King said "I will bring the Bhil to you, dead or alive I am a Kshatriya by caste My ancestors were Jhalas who have shown their bravery not only in Gujarat, Saurashtra and Cutch, but also in Rajasthan I will be successful, at the cost of my life,' said Khanaji Thakur King Beghda gave him a small force from his army and he set out

One day the Bhil invaded Ahmedabad He looted the shops Those who tried to prevent the lootings were killed He plundered whatever and wherever he went The people began shouting, the women crying But everyone was powerless against the Bhil and his followers After having finished with the shops, the band went to the homes of the rich merchants of Ahmedabad Seeing the gang approaching they closed the doors and from the windows began to throw out all their valuables They were quite prepared to lose their gold rather than their lives. The Black Bhil shouted to his followers and said, 'There is enough wealth here to last not only our own life time but for those who

come after Saying this he and his men began to collect the valuables and fill their bags Suddenly there were shouts and the firing of guns The King's force appeared led by Khanaji Thakur The bullets hit the heads of the Bhils and they dropped dead The leader, the Black Bhil, kept on shouting to his men not to be afraid, but seeing the army the rest of the band escaped Khanaji Thakur and and his men surrounded the Black Bhil and he was unable to escape Thakur came forward and said to him 'All this time you had managed to escape but now your time has come If you are a man come and fight with me' They both pulled out their swords and the fight began The Bhil tried all kinds of tricks and tried to catch the Thakur unawares, but he failed and eventually jumped on to a tree Khanaji Thakur threw his spear at the Bhil, and killed him He fell to the ground The body of the Black Bhil was carried to the palace and put before Mahmood Beghda He was very pleased with Khanaji Thakur and as a reward gave him land and villages where he became the ruler

25

THE CUNNING BRAHMIN

Jadhoji Bhatt was an old Brahmin of the royal family of Surendranagar He was ninety years old, very learned and well versed in the arts Since he was too old, he had handed over his duties to his nephew Vallabhji, but his interest in the affairs of the palace did not wane Every day he would ask Vallabhji whether anything of interest had come to pass, what the queen or any of the courtiers had said He used to go to the palace but once a year, on the day of the New Year, receive his gifts and come back

One day as the old Brahmin was in the midst of his meditation, his nephew returned from the palace with the news that the land belonging to the royal family was going to be divided between the two brothers-Arjan Singh and Sabal Singh, who at that time were ruling together "It remains to be seen who gets Surendranagar, since this is the more important of the two they both want it' Vallabhji said, Old Jadhoji Bhatt got up from his prayers He was very concerned, since his interest lay in Arjan Singh the elder brother He was keen that he should be given Surendranagar, while the younger Prince got Chuda

The next morning the Brahmin arrived in the palace Everyone was surprised to see him He entered and in one of the rooms he saw both the brothers, sitting together and talking "Why did you take the trouble of coming here? We could have come to you instead," Arjan singh asked "I

heard that you were going to distribute the territories, so I came to bless you,' the Bramin said 'We are still deciding on who should get what, and there is a difference of opinion I being the elder feel, I should make my choice first and then give Sabal Singh what remains, but he feels that since he is the younger of the two he should be given the first choice Can't you decide for us?' both the brothers asked The Brahmin said with great cunning "Your Highnesses, do not ask me to make a choice To me you are both the same and I would rather not get mixed up in the affairs of the court I am a simple Brahmin devoted to pryaer 'That is all the more reason why you should decide for us We will abide by your decision as we have faith in you the Princes said

"I will tell you a story Listen carefully Once upon a time there lived a Rishi He had two pupils For twelve years they lived with the Rishi and studied with him The Rishi taught them all he knew Having finished their education they were ready to go home One night the Rishi was sitting at prayer, surrounded by flames which glowed in earthen pots The boys went to him to ask for his blessings The rishi took some ash from the fire and gave some to each of the boys One of the boys thinking the ashes to be holy put it into his mouth and ate it The other one threw it away The one who had swallowed the ash became a learned man, whilst the other one remained a fool and came back to the Rishi and blamed him for not teaching him well"



"In this case also both of you are dear to me and my decision might not please you," the Brahmin said But the boys insisted and it was agreed that the next moring the Brahmin would decide When the Brahmin returned home he thought deeply and decided to give Surendranagar to Arjan Singh, so he wrote a note to him saying "Behave like an obedient pupil, and all will be well" He sent this secretly through Vallabhji to Arjan Singh

The next morning he went back to the palace All the attendants were asked to leave and the doors were closed Bhatt spoke quietly and told them —"Do you remember the story of the two pupils ?" The Princes nodded and said, "We will not blame you for anything" Taking two pieces of paper, the Brahmin wrote something on them and held them out to the boys "On one chit I have written the name Surendranagar On the other Chuda, the remaining twelve villages will be divided equally between the two of you' Arjan Singh took, a chit first, and said ' Whatever has been decided is good

enough for me," and he swallowed the bit of paper Sabal Singh was surprised and asked, "Without seeing what was written, you have swallowed it" "There is nothing to worry about Your chit is there Whatever is not written there will be my share," Arjan said Sabal Singh opened his bit of paper and saw written there—Chuda The distribution was over, Sabal Singh went to Chuda where he took over the administration, and Arjan Singh remained on in Surendranagar

The secret of the cunning Brahmin became known after sometime He had written "Chuda' on both the bits cf paper, and Arjan Singh was the "obedient pupil," who had swallowed his bit of paper This story is well known in Surendranagar and people talk and laugh over it still

26

THE VILLAGE MOTHER

It was a winter s morning, and the sun's rays were not scorching The sky was blu and cloudless Gentle breezes swayed the trees, and the parrots chased one another in the branches It was a day to gladden the heart In the fields of sugarcane the farmers' children were playing The sun seemed to up their faces with the colours of the rainbow Everylight where was joy, sunlight and shadow !

An old man and woman were sitting near a fire and warming their hands They looked a contented couple without any cares Suddenly from a distance in a cloud of dust they could see a horseman approaching. The children gathered together to see who he was The old woman stood up, and shading her weak eyes from the sun, peered into the distance The old man was poking the fire, adding bits of wood into the glowing embers

The horseman came up to them and said "I am thirsty Give me some water please

The woman said to him, her wrinkled face lighting up "We have sweet sugarcane juice here Come with me into the field ' The young man followed The woman took her sickle and with a few swift strokes cut a sugar cane, and the juice gushed out She filled the glass and gave it to the man He drank and asked for more The woman began cutting again, but this time there was no juice She was very upset and her eyes filled with tears. She said loudly—'God is displeased with me The earth

has suddenly gone dry, or perhaps the King has become merciless, as otherwise this would never have happened."

The man hearing this, was surprised. He bowed his head and touched the feet of the old woman saying—"I am the king, so forgive me. O God! When I was drinking the juice I thought to myself that I should increase the revenue on the these fields. These farmers are paying me so little and making tremendous profits for themselves. The soil is so fertile—the land is mine."



He told the old woman to try and cut some sugarcane and fill his glass She picked up her sickle and cut and once again the juice gushed out and she filled the glass to the brim

It is said—"As the King, so his subjects"